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IN BEAUTY, I WALK:  
TOWARD A MATERNAL PRAXIS OF DINÉ DECOLONIZATION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

This dissertation proposes a potential pathway to rethink how Diné matrilineal knowledge can work to inform a Diné female academic identity. In keeping with the decolonizing traditions of Indigenous scholars, I will use a Beautyway lens—as mediated by Diné traditional learning modalities—to explore how the narrations of three generations of Navajo rug weavers, *Shimásáni* (my maternal grandmother, Sally Yazzie), *Shimáyázhí* (my mother’s sister, Lena Yazzie), *Shimá* (my mother, Nora Wilkinson), and *Shideezhi* (my younger sister, Sallie Wilkinson), point to the contemporary criticality of the primacy of feminine agency—a heuristic and familial intelligence. To this end, I will engage the transformative possibilities that can dialogically emerge from a rewoven matrifocal understanding of the world, and its implications for conducting doctoral research, as well as how it informs institutional persistence as a Diné research doctorate.

*Dedicated to the ancestors and forthcoming generations of the Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa and Sahnish nations, my parents, Wilbur Dale Wilkinson and Nora (Yazzie-Horseherder) Wilkinson, my sisters, Norma (Wilkinson) Naito and Sallie LaNova Wilkinson, the Tó'aheedliinii (Water Flows Together Clan), to the Waterbuster Clan, for Kinlichii'nii (Red House People), and for the Flint Knife Clan. Special dedication lovingly goes to my husband, Ryan Paul Davidson and to our beautiful sons, William and Matthew, who umbilically motivate, inspire and ground my work*

## Opening Prayer

Thank you *Shimá Na'has dzaan Ahxéhee' Shi T'áá Diyin*. I come before you on bended knees here on Mother Earth. *Shi T'áá Diyin*, I offer this prayer to your ears. Thank you for the many answered prayers and the many wonderful blessings that you have given us. Now I ask for Your blessings that only You can provide with the authority, the power, and the love you have for us. My daughter, Charlotte Davidson, whom I love dearly, has requested of me a prayer for her work on this dissertation.

I ask thee, *Shi T'áá Diyin*, for the release of the many wonderful blessings that is in store for her as her progresses and as her work is finalized to its completion. The processes that have been utilized have come about through prayers, introspection, and humbling life ways that her people have lived for many generations ago and that are still practiced. Her grandfather, Kee Yazzie Horseherder, prayed on bended knees, before my daughter Charlotte was born, that “my grandchildren carry on and live this humble way of life.” My father has passed on; nevertheless, his prayer her been answered. Thank you *Shi T'áá Diyin*.

Thank you, *Shi T'áá Diyin*, for blessing me with my mother, father, grandmothers, grandfathers, brother, sister, my three daughters, my two grandsons, my niece and nephew, my two son-in-laws, and my children's father. Thank you, *Shi T'áá Diyin*, for *Shizhé'é*, Larry Emerson, and my daughter's advisor, Antonia Darder, as well as James Anderson, Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, and her colleagues who have contributed to her work and who have offered prayers for her. Thank you, *Shi T'áá Diyin*, for whoever will find the time and consideration to read this dissertation and give a thought or two after reading it, and to find it in their hearts that *Náhookáá Dine'é Bilá 'ashdla'* (Earth Surface People whom are five-fingered) are a people here on this earth, too.

Hózhó náhásdlíí’

Hózhó náhásdlíí’

Hózhó náhásdlíí’

Hózhó náhásdlíí’

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deepened the positive regard I have for the inherent beauty of my maternal and paternal lineages, and their relevancy to the sphere of higher education.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*The stories of my grandmothers are woven with wool and weft. They emerge upward layer upon layer into the Glittering World. Modern stories are woven with words on computers. They drop from above into the Glittering World*  
—Laura Tohe, *Autobiography 1*.

### Indigenous Protocol and Ancestral Acknowledgement

For my Diné relations:

Ya'at'ééh, shi éí Asdzaan Shadi'aah  
yinishyé.  
Tó'aheedliinii éí nishłı́ doo Miripati  
éí báshishchíín, aádoo Kinlichíí'nii éí da  
shichei, doo ME'tsiroku éí da shináí.

Hello, my name is Woman from the  
South.  
I am of the Water Flows Together  
Clan and I am born for the  
Waterbuster Clan. My maternal  
grandfather's clan is the Red House clan and  
my paternal grandfather is of the Flint Knife  
Clan.

And for my Hidatsa relations:

Doosha', Mu'ra shii Mia uuwaadiguash  
Charlotte Davidson heec. Mii Araxpaguaog,  
Hidatsag, Hii Aragurahuuc.

Hello, my name is Charlotte  
Davidson. I am of the Mandan,  
Hidatsa, and Sahnish nations.

Mii meecii Noogac hii Mii Mirii  
Badii garishtaac. Maa duu  
Ciidaa Xa'xiish hees.

My Indian name is Woman from the  
South. I am of the Waterbuster clan  
and Flint Knife clan.

Hii Ma'guu Xuubaadii Eeca gu'reesh  
Heec,  
Hii Maaruu daaka'Aashii heec.  
Hii Ma'guu iihuu Cagaaga Wiash Heec  
hii aaduu Ceesha xabish heec.

My father is Spotted Tail.

My grandparents are Keeps all the  
Medicine and One Horn.

Ceesha Xabish Mirii Baadii gu'ree  
doorish guuraa'rnaka'wa.

My great grandmother is Bird  
Woman and my great grandfather is Wolf  
Lies Down, who was the first keeper of the  
sacred Waterbuster bundle, upon its return  
to the Fort Berthold reservation.

I am the granddaughter of Sally (Blackmountain) and Kee (Horseherder) Yazzie and Molly (Wolf) and Ernest Wilkinson. I am the daughter of Nora (Horseherder-Yazzie) and Wilbur Dale Wilkinson, and I am the eldest of two sisters, Norma Jean (Wilkinson) Naito and Sallie LaNova Wilkinson. Although I am an enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish<sup>1</sup>), who are located on the Fort Berthold reservation in west-central North Dakota, I was primarily reared within the sacred mountains (*Sisnajini*, White Shell Mountain to the east; *Tsoodzil*, Turquoise Mountain to the south; *Dook o'ooslíid*, Abalone Mountain to the west; *Dibé Nitsaa*, Obsidian Mountain to the north; and the central doorway mountains of *Ch'ool'i,i*, Precious Stones Mountain, and *Dzilná'oodilii*, Soft Goods Mountain) of *Diné Bikéyah* (Navajoland).

Among my mother and father's people, the protocol for introducing oneself is to offer information about one's location, so that a relationship can be established through political, cultural and social grounds (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Smith, 1999). In locating myself, *first*, as a Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish woman, *then* as a researcher, I am wedding my inherent right as a self-determined Native woman to "write, speak, and act from a position of agency" (Giroux as cited by Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 9). This is furthered by Lyons (2000) consideration of the "duplicitous interrelationships between writing, violence, and colonization" (p. 449), and thusly, forwards "rhetorical sovereignty" by lambently advocating for its purpose.

The [P]eople want sovereignty, and in the context of the colonized scene of writing, rhetorical sovereignty. As the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in the pursuit of self-determination, rhetorical

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as Arikara, Sahnish is the preferred name we use to reference ourselves. While the English translation means "the original people from which all tribes sprang," oral historians surmise that Arikara is a derivative of a Pawnee expression that refers to the manner in which the Sahnish people tribally styled their hair. For more information, visit: <http://www.mhanation.com/main/history.html>

sovereignty requires above all the presence of an Indian voice, speaking or writing in an ongoing context of colonization (p. 462).

I have also chosen to take a lesson from Cherokee scholar, Daniel Heath Justice (2004) who explains that the “fundamental point about the relationship of Indians to academia” (p. 101) is to acknowledge on whose land we stand. The University of Illinois, the flagship campus of the state, is much like other academic institutions in the United States in that it rests on homeland that once belonged to Indigenous nations (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). For this reason, I would like to respectfully acknowledge these nations of people: Ho-Chunk, Quapaw, Kaskaskia, Meskwaki, Wea, Sac, Peoria, Potawatomi, Myaamia, Piankesaw, Odawa, and Kickapoo.

Also in relation to the declarative posture of this work is the compositional presentation of my viewpoint. As opposed to subscribing to a classical third person point of view, I have opted to move toward a style of discourse that is cast within a first person context. Caslin and Breton’s (2008) consideration of using a third person voice in our projects states: “to use an impersonal, distanced, objectified voice...feels contrary to the decolonizing movement away from objectification and toward owning [my] perspectives as [a] conscious human being” (p. 514). In line with this thinking, I employ a first person voice as a way to maintain the construct of a decolonizing framework, while attempting to avoid separation, alienation, and disconnection from my work.

In this work, I will use the terms Navajo<sup>2</sup>, Diné, *Náhookáá Dine’é* (Earth Surface People) and *Bilá ‘ashdla’* (Five-Fingered Ones) interchangeably, as we use these names to identify

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<sup>2</sup> Navajo is considered a prescribed label with Spanish or Pueblo origins, while Diné is a culturally ascribed term our people use to describe ourselves. *Náhookáá Dine’é* is a spiritual idiom that is a shortened version of *Nihima Nahookaa’ Diyin Dine’e* (Holy Earth Surface People), and *Bilá ‘ashdla’* is a pedagogical term used to teach Diné culture.

ourselves (Denetdale, 2007). Whereas, the denotation of other Indigenous Peoples with a “place-based existence” (Cornthassel, 2005) within the continental United States, will be recognized through the signifiers of “Indigenous,” “Native,” “Native American,” and “American Indian.”

Irrespective of employing heavy usage of Diné-specific terminology, concepts, metaphors, and cosmological understandings, this study is not a deliberate rebuke of the ethos prevalent in Mandan, Hidatsa and Sahnish societies, all of which I am proudly descended from. Conversely, this is a project endorsed by these relations who recognize it as being ancestrally guided and sustained by an epistemological spine that bears semblance to that of my father’s people (W. Wilkinson, personal communication, November 28, 2009).

Before launching into the purpose, significance, and overview of this study, it is necessary to premise my remarks by noting that I regard the process of writing this introduction as a “naming ceremony.” Just as the name, Woman From the South, was given to me by my paternal grandmother’s sister, Helen Wolf, indicates where I come from, who I am, and what I stand for, so, too, does the introductory segment of this chapter. It is a decree that conveys to the world that this newly born project, with earnest and assiduous effort, endeavors to become attuned with its intent. Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibway author and poet, Heid E. Erdrich (2002) tenderly speaks to this vision within the introductory chapter of her own work:

All the relatives have come together to celebrate this new [being] that is just now going out into the world to make her voice—voices—known. We pause to wish her well on her way and pray for her journey. The name has been dreamed and now we speak it...as we remember how it came to be and thank all those who came before [her]” (p. xiii).

### **Shi’ Sha’Hane’ (My Story)**

The educational landscape of my family is delineated by a contrasting terrain of experiences. While my maternal grandparents received no formal education in Western schools,

my paternal grandparents graduated from Elbowoods High School on the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. My mother's primary and secondary education consisted of attending various United States government boarding schools on the Navajo Reservation, while my father attended a Bureau of Indian Affairs day school in White Shield, North Dakota. Both of my parents graduated from Haskell Indian Junior College in Lawrence, Kansas, and my father, later received a B.A. in Business Administration from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. After several years of marriage, my parents divorced and my mother earned a certificate in accounting, bookkeeping and data entry from Mountain State Institute of Technology in Phoenix, Arizona. My younger sisters both completed baccalaureate programs; Sally earned her degree in American Indian Studies from Haskell Indian Nations University, while Norma graduated from the University of Arizona with a major in Judaic Studies and a minor in Russian.

In canvassing the educational record of my family, it is clear that I have undertaken an unprecedented effort in pursuing an advanced academic degree. The anomalous nature of this phenomenon is further quantified by the acute underrepresentation of Native Americans in graduate and professional programs, as examined by Wichita and Affiliated Tribes of Oklahoma scholar, Heather Shotton (2008):

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2004), American Indians comprise only a fraction of a percent of the Ph.D. (0.4%), M.D. (0.7%) and J.D. (0.8%) degrees conferred annually. According to 2004 data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2005), the total enrollment for graduate programs in U.S. institutions of higher education was approximately 2.1 million. Of this total, 1.4 million (65.5%) were White, 220,400 (10.2%) were African American, 125,800 (5.8%) were Hispanic, 111,700 (5.4%) were Asian, and 13,400 (0.6%) were American Indian. Enrollment of American Indian females in graduate programs was considerably higher than that of American Indian males--8,100 versus 4,700 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2005) reports that there were 46,024 doctoral degrees granted in 2004. Of those doctoral degrees awarded, women earned 21,683 (47.1%), racial and ethnic

minorities earned 6,263(approximately 13%), American Indians earned 230 (.4%). American Indian women earned 125 (54%) of the doctoral degrees conferred to American Indians in 2005 (U.S.Department of Education, 2005) (p. 5).

Given those statistics, I am aware of the gravity that this kind of education has in relation to what I can do for American Indian people. However, it has been an experience fraught with states of order and chaos. Articulated in his research on the adaptive challenges of contemporary Navajo education leadership, Timothy Begaye (2003) defines this contextual imbalance as “disequilibria,” which he describes as being marked by periods of “confusion about future direction, respon[se] to external threats, internal conflict, [and] disorientation...in regard to roles and relationships” (p. 5). He goes on to add that this breeds “two continuous patterns of thought,” thereby yielding “two parts to every context [that are] operated in, two sets of expectations, two cultures, two languages, two social systems, and...problems and issues...originate from two sources and are likely to have two solutions” (p. 139). Mirrored in my own story of intermittent unhappiness of graduate program life, this epistemological tussle has been a perennial trial in staying true to who I am as a Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish woman. At this juncture, it is important to mention that disclosing the cacophony of events in the ensuing section is not meant to recreate harm; as an immutable part of my “becoming” a doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), it is the seed of my study.

## **Indigenous Dissidence**

*At some point in the making of a dissident, one reaches a point of no return; not because one feels compelled by comrades or forced by foes to do so, but because one comes to understand that our greatest political agency, as individuals and communities, resides not in our perfection of ideas or the correctness of our actions but in our on-going commitment to struggle for our humanity—Antonia Darder, A Dissident Voice: Essays on Culture, Pedagogy, and Power*

Prior to my acceptance to the University of Illinois, I attended Haskell Indian Nations University<sup>3</sup> (HINU), a post-secondary institution that operates under the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (AIHEC, 2011). It was here that my choice of entering the American Indian Studies program changed how I saw the face of scholarship. For me, it reflected a countermovement away from the once insidious United States federal government dictum to “kill the Indian, and save the man,” to one that behooved me to ensure that our “First Voice” (Graveline, 2000) occupied the center stage of our research. Haskell executive administrator and American Indian Studies faculty member, Venida Chenault (Prairie Band Potawatomi) (2001) outlines this departmental goal in the following:

Haskell Indian Nations University recognizes the importance of holistic approaches and culturally relevant curricula in the educational success of First Nations students. Emphasizing the interconnectedness of the various disciplines, the critical need for academic research and scholarship which advances practical, relevant solutions and approaches for dealing with contemporary issues found in First Nations families, communities and organizations are hallmarks of the American Indian Studies degree at Haskell Indian Nations University.

This program proposes a revisiting of the role played by traditional elders, scholars and professionals in the educational preparation of American Indian people. It suggests eliminating the historic banishment such knowledge bearers have traditionally experienced in the arena of higher education, with the establishment of a "credential of eminence" appointment for visiting traditional elders.

Established thematic foundations of this degree provide a framework for interdisciplinary collaboration to teach "the story of the people" and to ensure the most effective use of institutional resources. Additionally, preparing students with cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspectives will strengthen leadership potential as graduates engage social institutions as First Nations professionals. (p.80).

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<sup>3</sup>Established in 1884 as the Indian Industrial Training School, Haskell has evolved into a federally supported four-year land grant institution exclusively attended by an intertribal constituency of students—an American Indian and Alaskan Native student body that represents many of the 565 federally recognized tribes in the United States. For more information, please visit: <http://www.haskell.edu/>



My educative experience at Haskell not only landmarked a nascent cognizance of what being an American Indian scholar meant, but a “personal sensibility” (Horse, 2005) of how research can serve as an open expression that intelligently emphasizes the “historical struggles for voice, participation, and self-determination” (Darder, 2011, p. 72), which has seeded the process of my political formation as a Native female academic.

As a matter of happenstance, in the fall of 2001, I was introduced to two representatives from UIUC who were staffing a booth at Haskell’s annual career fair. Unlike other institutional delegates, they energetically engaged me and continued to correspond with me about advancing the tertiary level of my education at their campus. During the spring of 2005, I accepted an invitation for a recruitment visit to UIUC—albeit, a campus stay that lasted only a few hours, I decisively choose to apply to and was admitted to the Educational Policy Studies program, now known as the Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership program. With great optimism and shimmering spirit, I entered the portico of the academy in the fall of 2005.

Assuming that an institutional matriculation, like mine, would be recognized and understood as an intense epistemological shift, it was, instead, met with limited acceptance and minimal support. As an incoming graduate student new to academic research, I felt my identity as an American Indian woman begin to fracture under the seemingly immovable weight of the Western methodological applications that offered little to no credence of the primal knowledge of Indigenous people. Disheartened, I approached a particular set of seasoned Native researchers and a senior faculty member of my department to receive counsel in creating a framework that would uphold the beliefs and values perpetuated through my personhood as a *Bilá ‘ashdla’* (Five-Fingered Person). Instead, I was castigated for wanting to incorporate such a dimension into my research. For a brief time, I acquiesced and avoided clothing my work using a Navajo

viewpoint, but this created a barrier in beginning the research process. What is more, I intuitively felt this to be a disservice to not only myself, but to my family. My vision of graduate education grew dim, as my reluctance to ground my work within a paradigm that discounted my cultural identity engendered bouts of immobilizing grief and confusion that nearly pulverized my overall wellbeing.

Although an on-campus resource and support center, dedicated to the recruitment, retention, advocacy, and programmatic needs of self-identified American Indian and Alaskan Native students, provided intervals of solace, it often shapeshifted into the antithesis of what its organizational philosophy, purpose and goals outlined: to foster support, community, and inclusivity. While employed within this organization for the first four and half years of my graduate career, it has been a site where I have endured aggressive attacks against who I am as a self-aware Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish woman. The identity markers engraved in my phenotype, active links to my tribal communities, and enrolled citizenship of a federally recognized tribe, unintentionally silenced a small cluster of students—who in response, vehemently opposed all efforts I invested in designing and implementing cultural, academic, and social programming to advance academic and communal kinship. The lack of tribal affinity was especially evident when these programs included Diné speakers or themes. Adding to these transgressions was the center's only administrative support staff person, whose overt display of hostility toward Native students, community members, and student affairs practitioners not only generated a paternalistic climate, but made it a challenge for myself and others to execute student development services.

To repeat, I offer a look into these moments of tribulation not to inflict harm, but to focus on my unknowingness in having specialized knowledge in ways that would help me fully

understand my positions as an Indigenous scholar, and how best to orienteer myself toward identifying a “Navajo-ized” (Begay & Maryboy, 1998) approach that would assure a harmonious outcome to such trials, tensions, and conflicts unique to post-secondary settings. A salient part of my story, the power of these experiences has fed my attempt to “turn the power”—a phrase used by Hopi historian, Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert (2010) to contextualize how Hopi students at Sherman Institute in the early 1920’s “create[d] an educational experience that benefited not only themselves, but also their communities” (p. xxx). Henceforward, to “turn the power” of this painful experience, I began to develop the moral courage to purposely place the politic of *Hózhó* as the decolonizing core of my being and my research.

**Dawning of Indigenous Critical Consciousness.** The amelioration of these impasses was one of many recovery periods marked by my engagement with Indigenous decolonization, natural law, and traditional Diné knowledge in an American Indian Studies seminar course titled, “Indigenous Learning and Decolonizing Methodologies.” Facilitated by Diné educator Larry Emerson in the spring of 2005, student participants were required to produce a class project in the form of a traditional learning modality—which we understand to be, “a non-modern way of creative expression that follows familiar, age-old procedures and materials typically found in the natural world” (L. Emerson, personal communication, April 12, 2008). Leaning away from institutional forms of data transmission, this project served as a sensory channel in which information could be given, received, and stored, and differed from didactic pedagogical models that tend to usurp the autonomous growth, self-determination and tribal sovereignty of Indigenous people (Bates, 2009).

While I have begun to provide a silhouette of my role as a Native scholar within this chapter, the development of this once featureless conscience was given form through the creation

of a traditional Navajo modality known as a *Tádídíín Bijish*—corn pollen bag. Much like the experience I had undergone with the parturition of my sons, I did not forecast that this sort of life creation would unseal an inmost doorway that would cause me to, once again, think of how the course of my actions can either repeat or become a cycle of repair. In the same way the climatic period of spring is marked by new plant growth, this process sparked a new sensibility of who I am and who my family is. Foregrounding this holistic and intrinsic form of learning was the emic process of *Hózhó*, or what Diné scholar Herbert Benally (2008) describes as “the pursuit of peace and happiness” (p. 49). Although permutations of the contextual definitions of *Hózhó* exists (Benally, 2008; Clark, 2009; Denetdale, 2006; Emerson, 2006; Haskie, 2002; McAlpin, 2008; McCullough-Brabson & Help, 2002; M’Closkey, 2002; Thomas, 1996), the meaning is centered in the Navajo life goal of achieving balance and harmony (Benally, 2008). While *Hózhó* is an intrinsic element of my dissertation story, further discussion of how I have come to this as the main stalk of my research will be written about in the methodology section of this dissertation.

It is with immense emancipatory relief that in light of the “cultural sojourn” (Huffman, 2005) I experienced in my budding identity as a doctoral Native female academic, I began to critically re-evaluate, rethink and redesign my participation in the world, to the extent that this study will examine the ways of knowing of the institutionally unconferred educators in my family—a feminine perspicacity I have trusted throughout my life. Through interviews with three successive generations of female Navajo rug weavers, this research project will provide a matrifocal understanding of the ways academic citizenship can serve as a contemporary channel to vanguard my hereditary onus as a Native woman.

To this end, this dissertation is based upon a personal, familial, localized and partial understanding of the faceted animation of *Hózhó*, for “only a healer/chanter is knowledgeable of all Navajo ways” (Lee, 2006, p. 85). Not to be reduced in importance is the risk of unprotected knowledge. Throughout this study, I have conferred with family, tribal elders, and mentors in resolving what is only ours to know and what is permissible to share within the academic domain. Whereas, the matrilinear correlation of my study catalyzes the formation of this intellectual project as a once silent song wishes to be sung back into place, so a recovery of beauty or *Hózhó náházdíí’* may prevail. With this acknowledgement in mind, I must point out that while special emphasis in my writing is given to feminine voice, experience, and agency, I understand that the Diné worldview is one that is fundamentally driven by “the duality of knowledge” between males and females, as projected through the philosophy of *Sa’ah Naagháí Bik’eh Hózhóón* (Benally 2008; Clark; 2009; L. Emerson, personal communication, April 6, 2012). Therefore, it is with a mother’s tonal intonation that I consider this dissertation to be a fervent war cry to reclaim what is mine, so I may give it back to my children. And so, it is with this avowal I respectfully ask:

If to help [me] is your wish than stand  
behind [me].

Not to the side.

And not to the front (Kalahele as cited by Deyhle et al., 2008, p. 344).

### **A Précis of Navajo Rug Weaving**

Weaving is a spiritual gift from *Na’ashjé’ii Asdzáá* (Spider Woman) (S. Wilkinson, personal communication, November 19, 2008), where *Na’has dzaan* (Mother Earth) and *Ya’dil hil* (Father Sky) unite (Bennett & Bighorse, 1997); Elements of the physical universe gather

together to form the structure of the loom (see Figure 1), which *Na'ashje'ii Hastiin* (Spider Man) architecturally helped erect (Clark, 2009): the top signifies the sky; the bottom represents the earth; the strings that secure the loom to the frame symbolizes lightening; and the warp embodies falling rain (Roessel, 1995). Also brought into existence in this manner, were the spinning and weaving tools:

The batten was a sun halo, white shell made the comb. There were four spindles: one a stick of zigzag lightening with a whorl of cannel coal; one a stick of flash lightening with a whorl of turquoise; a third, had a stick of sheet lightening with a whorl of abalone; a rain streamer formed the stick of the fourth, and its whorl was white shell (McCollough-Brabson & Help, 2001, p. 136).

For the Diné, we concede that weaving began in this way. However, subsequent to the creation of the first loom and weaving tools, this historical narrative has typically been refracted by a propagating wave of prolific studies where archaeologists, anthropologists, and museologists have surmised that weaving is a borrowed art form from the Pueblos (Hedlund, 1996). In a seeming manner, consummate Non-Native consumers and arbiter collectors have been exalted as not only helping buttress a depressed reservation economy, but being instrumental to the sustainability of this art form (Dockstader, 1987). Similarly, with the advent of trading posts,<sup>4</sup> many traders are heralded with influencing rug design motifs and inculcating weavers to merge patterns with an intense range of aniline dyed yarn to aesthetically improve upon the tradesmen's criterion for fabricating handsome commodities (Kaufman & Selser, 1985). Additionally, Non-Navajos have privileged themselves in hypothesizing about the origins of the geometrical designs found in rugs such as the Storm Pattern; for weavers, this regional rug

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<sup>4</sup> With respect to history, trading posts were commercial establishments built around the late 1860's on the Navajo Reservation. While not unique to the Navajo Reservation, they . They not only sold a selection of consumer merchandise, but were mercantile centers where good and services could be bartered and pawn could be brokered.

style is resolutely believed to have definable characteristics coupled to practical cultural understandings of the land and cosmos, however

interpreters of Navajo design find this explanation fanciful; they believe the storm pattern design was influenced by the designs on flour sacks found on the trading post shelves. J.B. Moore featured a storm pattern rug in his 1911 catalogue, and some believe the design was Moore's own. Almost certainly, the symbolism credited to the storm pattern rug is a product of imaginative Anglo marketing (p. 102).

In the manuscript, *Patterns of Exchange: Navajo Weavers and Traders*, Teresa Wilkins (2008) observed how that the "commodification of the sacred" had led traders, such as J.B. Moore and J.L. Hubbell, to alter the technical innovation of weaving. With a foci on efficiency and upgrading the market quality of his inventory, Moore (owner and operator of Crystal Trading Company from approximately 1897-1911) transformed the customary fabrication of rugs by marshaling a "process of production...removed from the context of home and family and compartmentalized in a way that required many people to work with non-relative's products" (p 68).

While J.L. Hubbell (proprietor of the famed Hubbell Trading Post, located in Ganado, Arizona) commissioned weavers to copy painted illustrations of classical rug styles to fulfill "anti-modernist longings in Euro-American society that, for many upper and middle class Americans were channeled into the consumption of natural, primitive products" (p. 90). The documentation of this information has led many to theorize that the commercialization of rugs have not only galvanized weavers to rededicate their labored efforts to favor remunerative work over family, but are believed to have "radically changed the goals of weaving" (Carmean, 2002, p. 34). As extrapolations relative to the genesis, technique, and continuity of weaving are debated, a host of publications continue to submerge the principal actor in this "cosmological performance" (M'Closkey, 2002): the weaver. Navajo historian Jennifer Nez Denetdale (2001)

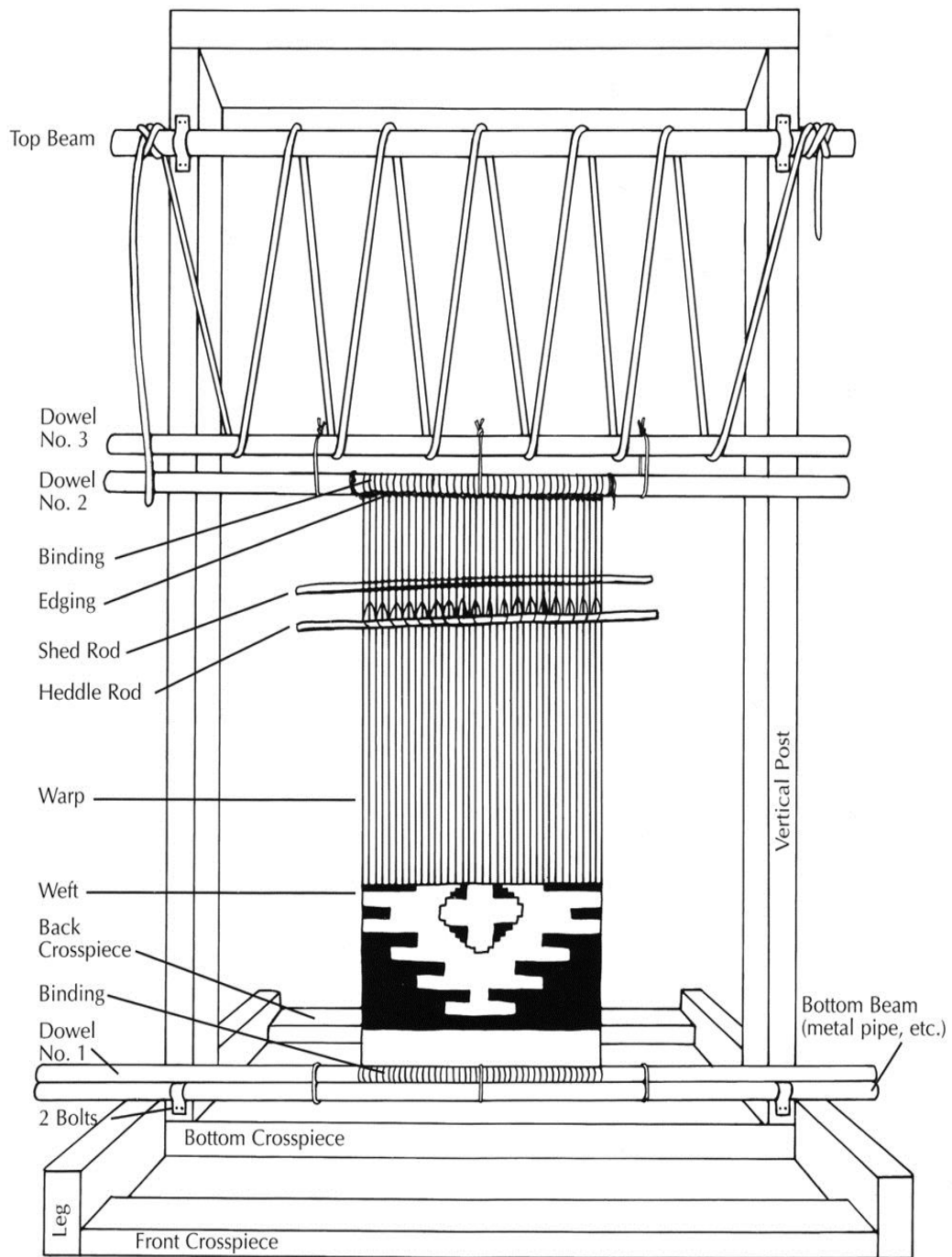


Figure 1. Bennett, N. & Bighorse, T. (1997). Navajo weaving loom.



supports this idea in her essay on Navajo women in the appositely titled segment, “Scholars Meet Spider Woman”:

The Navajo weaver is one of the most recognized southwestern figures; however, their textiles are better known, because, until fairly recently, attention centered on the textiles themselves, which were instrumental in the promotion of the Southwest as a tourist attraction that began in the late nineteenth century. However, recent reexaminations of Navajo women’s roles as weavers and the significance of weaving are challenging conventional notions of domesticity and economics, of the nature of women’s knowledge, and of women and social organization (p. 10).

In the monograph, *Swept Under the Rug: A Hidden History of Navajo Weaving*, Kathy M’Closkey (2002) has further noted the expunging of the societal agency of Navajo weavers from historical record. She informs us that “until very recently, [Navajo] women’s domestic work was seen as “natural”; it was perceived as a constant throughout history—an unchanging set of necessities that did not require analysis” (p. 246). Normally spoken about as a timeworn national memory within museum narratology, fresh insight has expanded the definition of what this material practice has to offer for students attending Diné College, the first tribal college in the United States. Former Diné College President, Ferlin Clark (2009) explains that the *Day’iistl’ó* (completed woven rug) is guided by a seamless process subsumed with the essence of the Navajo worldview, *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón*—which is the English equivalent of “one [who] is pursuing a long, happy and contented life” (p.235). As a cultural tome of Diné College, he writes that the *Day’iistl’ó*

represent[s] the Diné periodic table of elements, including water, fire, land, and air, combined with academic disciplines or areas of study, such as geology, geography, history, astronomy, chemistry, biology, and the various applications of math – addition, subtraction, division, multiplication, geometry, and calculus... With an ability to read each strand of a rug within the overall design one can discern what the storyteller/weaver is trying to convey. A story can fill many pages, or even a series of books, but the important thing to remember is that not all knowledge that is valuable and true is necessarily written down on paper, *naaltsoos*, whether in English or Navajo, but can still remain part of our everyday Diné way of life... Today, Diné College embraces change

and respects the contribution of new knowledge founded on old traditions of Diné ‘truths’ to provide a new kind of post-secondary education unique to the Navajo world view. One example of this singular approach is found in, *Dayiistl’o*, whereby an entire conceptual framework can be professed and taught by Diné weavers. A Diné weaving combines the four sacred elements, the four directions, and the stories, songs, and prayers found within the dual concept of male and female, *alchi silah*, and *the Sa’ah Naaghai Bik’eh Hozhoon* way of life applicable as a teaching and learning process within the Diné College philosophy and educational system (pp. 236-237).

In this conception, the *Day’iistl’o* offers a positive and culturally responsive approach to decode a Navajo person’s “socio-historic reality” (Battiste, 2008) that “provides a means of living out one’s understanding” (Villegas et al., 2008, p. 2), neither atrophied under a colonial language, nor corroded under a Western educative system. While the refrain “the home for intellectual activity is the university” (Altbach, 2008, p. 57) dominates most scholarly circles, this is contested within my family’s recollect of weaving—a part of the storied arc of weaving that has, until now, been historically recused.

### **Significance of Study**

Eulalie H. Bonar (1996) argues that the totality of Navajo weaving as a written topic has not been exhausted “in part because Navajo people have had little voice in the discourse” (p. 2). Appending this argument is Navajo scholar Harry Walters who testifies that Diné people are in the process of reconstructing this tradition (Hedlund, 1996), and in so doing are “altering [our] technology to maintain [our] epistemology” (Walters as cited by Hedlund, 1996, p. 63). With the ongoing reframing of Navajo culture there is an unending “need to continue to create new songs and new prayers” (Attakai as cited by Lee, 2004, p. 167), and new ways of perceiving our worldview as projecting unequivocal solutions to challenging conditions belonging to the present time. In keeping pace with the resounding call for new translations of long standing cultural

practices, it is my goal to contribute to the field of higher education by offering new answers as to how Diné traditional knowledge can serve as a decolonizing lens to critique colonized discourses regarding the nature of our existence in the world, particularly as female affiliates of the academy.

“As the tradition keepers of the Western world” (Williams & Tanaka, 2007, p. 18), predominately white institutions of higher education often understate the power that distinct tribal values have in complementing the holistic development of Native American students (Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Oosahwe, 2008). Accenting this claim is the scarcity of heuristic frameworks that reap theory from individual and communal engagements that are in concordance with Indigenous knowledge systems (Williams & Tanaka, 2007). In the same fashion, circulating discourses on Native American student success fails to document how these foundational philosophies often form the undercurrent to academic persistence and cultural survival (CHiXapkaid & Inglebret, 2007; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Hernandez, 1999; Secatero, 2009; Shotton, 2008; Waterman, 2004). As institutionalized capital continues to mute the primacy of place and Indigenous habitude within the milieu of educational academies, counter-hegemonic responses are needed to better grasp the strata of Native American student development (Pidgeon, 2009). Namely, how the “cultural offerings” of higher education institutions (Huffman, 2008) can become synchronized with the “inner lives” of Native American students (Evans, 1995).

Furthermore, studies involving Native women often foster results that are immaterial to their current roles in tribal societies (Denetdale, 2001). Choctaw scholar, Devon Mihesuah (1998) voices her opinion about interpretative studies of American Indian women by reporting that “many writers have explored how colonialism has changed tribal life, but few have written

about how Indian women have made the best of what colonialism has wrought” (p. 45). Karen Gayton Swisher (1998) of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, adds that non-Indian people have been eulogized for the mounting scholarly production about Indian education and are “cited more often than the experts from whom their experience and information was gathered” (p. 192). With these points in mind, I have chosen to build upon the scholarly latticework of American Indian researchers who have culled their projects using frameworks that privilege and defend the legitimacy of tribal ways of knowing, particularly in university settings (Alfred, 2004; Battiste, 2000, 2002, 2008; Begaye, 2004; Bishop, 2008; Cajete, 2005; Cannella & Manuelito, 2008; Clark, 2009; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Denetdale, 2006; Emerson, 2008; Gilbert, 2010; Lee, 2010; Martin, 2003; McAlpin, 2008; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Secatero, 2009; Smith, 1999; Struthers, 2001; Thorpe, 1996; Walker, 2003; Williams & Tanaka, 2007; Wilson, 2008). Along with this body of knowledge, I rely on the collective spirit of my familial female relations to tell me what the academy, alone, cannot: how may Diné women use their “cultural inheritance” (Brayboy, 2006) to inform a female Diné academic identity? Hence, the ensuing questions are fundamental to this dissertation:

1. What relevancy does traditional Diné knowledge have outside of its original context, namely within non-Indigenous post-secondary institutions?
2. How may the dialogical and critical exploration of a Diné female archetype be embodied through the intellectual life that is lived as a Diné female academic?
3. How does an intergenerational matrilineal narration of Diné female identity function as a pedagogy of beauty?

## Chapter 2

### A Review of the Literary Landscape of Decolonization in Higher Education

*Indigenous nations cannot successfully engage in nation-building projects that are driven by sovereignty and self-determination unless they develop independence of mind by taking action to restore pride in their traditions, languages, and knowledge. The arduous process of reasserting sovereignty begins not solely with the nation's land or (re)claiming economic and political processes...but with the sovereignty of peoples' minds—B. Brayboy, A. Fann, A. Catagno, & J. Solyom, Postsecondary Education for American Indians and Alaskan Natives: Higher Education for Nation Building and Self-Determination*

#### Overview

Ray Barnhardt (2002) contends that “Native students trying to survive in the university environment—an institution that is a virtual embodiment of modern consciousness—must acquire and accept a new form of consciousness, an orientation which not only displaces, but often devalues the world views they bring with them” (p.241)—an account that has been well-chronicled historically, (Adams, 1995; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Reyner & Eder, 2004; Szasz, 1999), within Ivy League settings (Brayboy, 2004; Garrod & Larimore, 1997) and predominantly white institutions (Fox & McClellan, 2005; Huffman, 2008; Lee, 2004; Oosahwe, 2008; Secatero, 2009; Shotton, 2008). Allied with this line of reasoning is that academia can create a repressive realm that is fragmenting, dehumanizing, epistemologically violent, and viciously adversarial (Davidson, 2009; Evans, 1995), which is owed to a language and epistemology that are not indigenous to Native ways of knowing and being (Emerson, 2003).

A point often overlooked is that the technical moniker of “expert” is not a “becoming” quality that most emerging American Indian researchers strive for (Erdrich, 1997), while courageously walking the road of higher education. This is a truth also observed by Mihesuah and Wilson (2004) of many Native scholars who have upwardly ascended through the tiered

layers of the academy into the professoriate. Given those words, what happens when a premium is, then, placed on who we are, where we come from, and where we intend to go (Lowe, 2005)? In accompaniment of staunchly safeguarding our own distinctive mode of wayfinding, what are the kinds of spaces that emerge? What is the new language that surfaces from these sites of struggle? What occurs when we enact practices that counter hegemony and question “business as usual?”

Divided into five parts, this chapter will provide an overview of literature that principally springs from a tribal pool of transdisciplinary writings from scholars who problematize the etic of academia through decolonizing projects. Part one, “Defining Decolonization,” sews together a range of explanations that expresses the essential nature of what decolonization has the power to do, and why scholars may implement it to offset non-indigenous friendly approaches to research. Section two, “Indigenous Knowledge: The Cognitive Other” borrows from Mi’kmaq scholar, Marie Battiste’s (2002) titled section within her work on the topic, pays special attention to the limitations associated with fully explaining the force, effect, and development of traditional knowledge as part of a literature survey. The third section, “Harmonizing Academic Discord” speaks to the nature of being an academic bound by two seemingly diametrically opposing spheres, and how our home communities provide the way to navigate this confluence. The fourth section, “A New Circle of Education” pulls from Cajete’s (2005) work on tribal education and discusses the epistemic innovation of using traditional modalities as a means to mediate decolonizing research, while the conclusion offers a summation of this chapter.

### **Defining Decolonization**

The literature available on the topic of decolonization reveals that, as a concept, it

is constantly evolving and continually being rearticulated. Hence, no fixed meaning exists for its understanding, according to a cadre of scholars who have come to define it from various experiences, contexts, and histories. Therefore, in an attempt to orient the reader to this conceptual discussion, academic explanations describe how decolonization entails a means to organize, develop, produce and evaluate research about, by, for and among Indigenous peoples.

Broadly, decolonization is a vehicle to “break free from the frames of Western epistemologies” (Porsanger, 2004) in an effort to reverse the process of colonization within the social, spiritual, political, natural and human spheres of existence. As a theoretical framework, Noonucal researcher, Karen Martin (2003) articulates it as a means to use Indigenous ontologies (being), epistemologies (knowing) and axiologies (doing) to re-claim, re-view, re-frame, re-search, re-visit, re-connect and re-present research, scholarship, and projects as they interface with colonialism. Feminist theorist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, (2006) states that decolonization involves and results in a powerful “transformation of self, community, and governance structures...It is a historical and collective process, and as such can only be understood within these contexts” (p. 7). According to Wanda McCaslin and Denise Breton (2008), decolonization is a concept that speaks to the complex interconnected systems of family, history, and culture. Moreover, they claim it is “about getting our ancestral wisdom back, so that respecting ourselves and others can be once again our way of life” (p. 513). Yet, it is important to note that the possibilities that decolonization holds are not limited to Indigenous Peoples, but are for all people (Battiste, 2000).

Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (Wahpetunwan Dakota) and Michael Yellow Bird (Sahnish/Arikara & Hidatsa) (2005) in the epigraph of *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*, casts decolonization as praxis to meaningfully resist the punitive nature

of colonialism through the “intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuates the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands...[decolonization] is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation” (p. 2).

This clarion call is echoed in Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (Maori) (1999) widely acclaimed book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Smith declares that, in the context of research, decolonization empowers indigenous peoples to develop a research protocol that is culturally derived, created in community and is not prescribed by a hierarchical structure of power. With this view in mind, she posits eight critical questions to ethically manage research and its development when conducting studies with consenting indigenous communities:

1. Who owns it?
2. Whose interest does it serve?
3. Who will benefit from it?
4. Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?
5. Who will carry it out?
6. Who will write it up?
7. How will its results be disseminated? (p. 10).

Maintaining that self-determination ought to pilot an indigenous researcher’s investigative course to revise facts, principles, theories, and applications, Smith strategically shapes this idea into an indigenous research agenda (see Figure 2). Using ocean tides as a cultural metaphor, the undulating motion of the model represents the

Maori equivalent of the four directions: the northern, the eastern, the southern and western. The tides represent movement, change, process, life, inward and outward flows of ideas, reflections and actions. The four directions named here— decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization—represent processes. They are not goals or



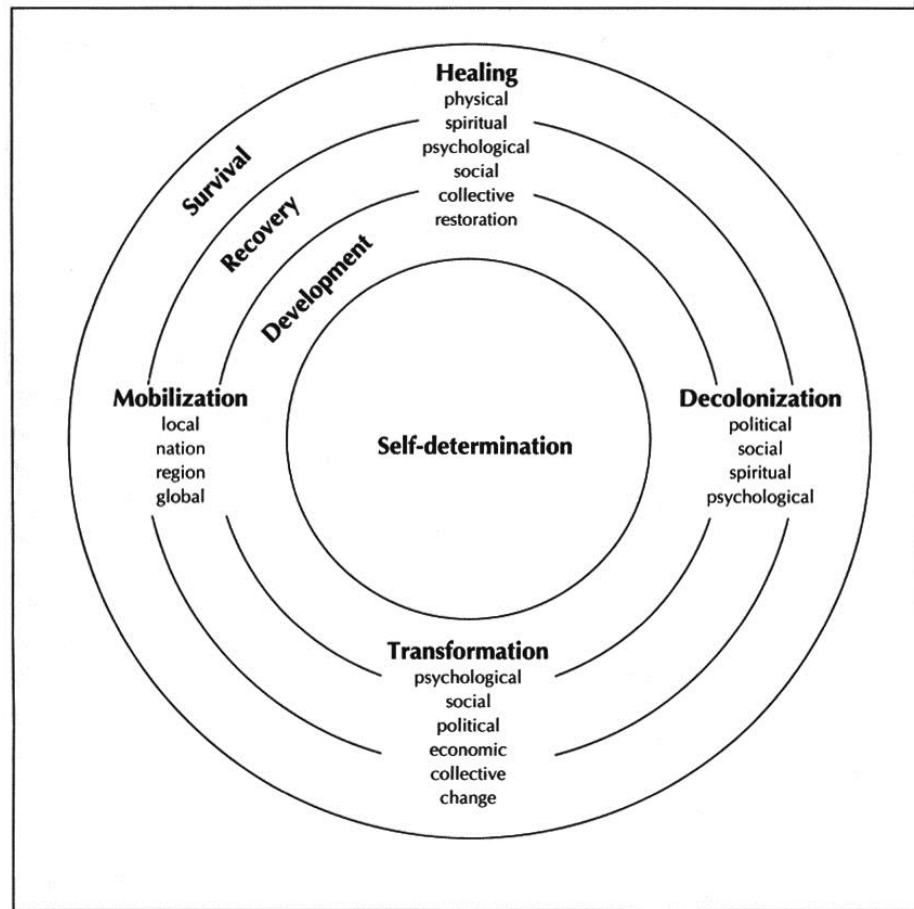


Figure 2. Smith, L. (1999) Indigenous Research Agenda.

ends in themselves. They are processes which connect, inform, and clarify the tensions between the local, the regional and the global. They are processes which can be incorporated into practices and methodologies (p. 116).

In spite of research roadmaps, like Smith's, decolonizing methodologies have not been given serious consideration, due to the academic world perceiving them as not belonging to any existing theory or preexisting school of Western thought (Porsanger, 2004). By the same token, academia's structural violence toward Indigenous peoples most often involves the privileging of scientific paradigms that relegate and limit these groups from entirely articulating their cultural realities (Walker, 2003). Comparatively, this form of academic gatekeeping involves "the fundamental denial of our freedom to be Indigenous in a meaningful way, and [is] the unjust

occupation of the physical, social, and political spaces we need to survive as Indigenous peoples” (Alfred, 2004, p. 89).

As a result, Native scholars have increasingly called for a concerted push to “indigenize the academy” (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004) by employing strategies that do not contravene our identity, but instead formulate approaches that are buttressed with a decolonizing counternarrative that hold positive regard for Indigenous perspectives (Alfred, 2004; Allen, 2002; Battiste, 2000, 2002, 2008; Begaye, 2004; Benally, 2008; Bishop, 2008; Cajete, 1999, 2000, 2005; Cannella & Manuelito, 2008; Clark, 2009; Crazy Bull, 1997; Davidson & Estrada, 2008; Davidson & Singson, 2008; Deloria, 1999; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Deyhle et al., 2008; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Emerson, 2008; Grande, 2004, 2008; Hernandez, 1999; Kaomea, 2004; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Martin, 2003; McAlpin, 2008; Meyer, 2008; Porsanger; Rheault, 2000; Sakiestewa-Gilbert, 2010; Secatero, 2009; Smith, 1999; Struthers, 2001; Walker, 2003; White Shield, 2009; Williams & Tanaka, 2007; Wilson, 2008). Sharing this same position are Donna Deyhle and Karen Swisher (1997) who write of the importance of Indigenous “dispositional knowledge” as being encoded with signposts that exude

the values and ethics that guide community life, shape social justice, and acknowledge [Indigenous] heritages. It is this kind of knowledge that is necessary to reconceptualize authority and pedagogy to incorporate a politics of difference and emancipation that does not assume assimilation as its goal (161).

Albeit, a moral challenge in colonial settings, decolonization can serve as a liminal space to merge our ancestral experiences with the heritage and customs of higher education.

### **Indigenous Knowledge: The Cognitive Other**

The ivory tower has been described as a site that symbolizes detachment and “relies heavily on decontextualized knowledge [that]...must be displayed in highly specialized literate

forms” (Barnhardt, p. 241, 2002). This bearing is signaled in Mi’kmaq educator, Marie Battiste’s (2002) report, *Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy in First Nations Education: A Literature Review with Recommendations*, where she warns scholars to tread cautiously as they undertake the task of pressing out written work about the particulars of Indigenous knowledge. To clarify her stance, she reasons that literature reviews about Indigenous knowledge is an oxymoron, since this brand of intelligence is characteristically oral, modeled, animated, and transmitted through practice and, as such, cannot be tightly defined within a textual medium. She further maintains that

...conducting a literature review on Indigenous knowledge implies that Eurocentric research can reveal an understanding of Indigenous knowledge. The problem with this approach is that Indigenous knowledge does not mirror classic Eurocentric orders of life. It is a knowledge system in its own right with its own internal consistency and ways of knowing, and there are limits to how far it can be comprehended from a Eurocentric point of view (p. 2).

Battiste’s position moves us to solemnly rethink the caveat that not all knowledge belongs in or to the academy, as it may not enable its safekeeping. While I concur with Battiste regarding this facet of the research process, I even more strongly agree with her second position that this type of written work is necessary so educational “policy makers may understand the context of First Nations educational reforms” (pp. 2-3). It is worth noting a lengthy quote to grasp these sonorous points, as it pertains to research:

Indigenous scholars discovered that indigenous knowledge is far more than the binary opposite of western knowledge. As a concept, indigenous knowledge benchmarks the limitations of Eurocentric theory—its methodology, evidence, and conclusions – re-conceptualizes the resilience and self-reliance of indigenous peoples, and underscores the importance of their own philosophies, heritages, and educational processes. Indigenous knowledge fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship. By animating the voices and experiences of the cognitive ‘other’ and integrating them into the educational process, it creates a new, balanced centre and a fresh vantage point from which to analyze Eurocentric education and its pedagogies (p. 5).

As Indigenous knowledge is trussed with the process of decolonization (McCaslin & Breton, 2008; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004), it would be amiss to discount it as part of the taproot of decolonization: the basis for its inclusion in this literature review.

As a starting point to this discussion, Tewa educator, Gregory Cajete (2005) informs us that no term exists in any American Indian language for the word epistemology. He goes on to say that as a principled system of understanding, it is as numbered and varied as the American Indian tribes that inhabit the United States. This apprise also leads us to recognize that the term “epistemology” is not a standalone denotation in describing the indigenous knowledge of Native Peoples, as other proper names include: “traditional knowledge,” “traditional ecological knowledge or TEK,” “local knowledge or wisdom,” “culture” and “indigenous technical knowledge” (Battiste, 2002). Owing to an omnipresent quality, traditional knowledge is enlivened throughout the course of being narrated, drawn, danced, carved, beaded, sewn, woven, and sung (Benally, 2008; Bishop, 2008; Cajete, 1999, 2000, 2005; Clark, 2009; McAlpin, 2008; Thomas, 1996; Williams & Tanaka, 2007; Wilson, 2008). To define generally, indigenous knowledge is the “established knowledge of [a] tribe” (De La Torre, 2004, p. 187) and “concerns information, understanding and knowledge that reflects symbiotic relationships between individuals, communities, generations, the physical environment and other living creatures, and the spiritual relationships of a people” (Mann as cited in Lincoln & Denzin, 2008, p. 567). In alliance with decolonization, Indigenous knowledge “is more than resistance to colonial domination, it is also a signifier of cultural revitalization and mounting Native nationalism” (Wilson, 2004, p. 84).

Quechua scholar, Sandy Grande’s (2004) *Red Pedagogy* addresses how modernist societies, with great alacrity, consider Indigenous knowledge an aberration to the social practices

of “the deep structures of the colonialist consciousness” (p. 69). Furthermore, the disenfranchisement of this knowledge reservoir by the academic mainstream makes invisible how to forge a cross-sectional reality between these “sociospacial markers”; an epistemic disparity that Grande outlines in the following piece:

The delineation of the difference between modern (secular) and traditional (sacred) societies and their competing views of land and nature helps to explain the persistence of severe conflict between such societies. Unlike secular societies—where land signifies property, property signifies capital, and capital signifies wealth, status, and power—land in “sacred” societies signifies connection to family, tribe, and ancestors...More significantly, these distinctions are not merely inscribed as differences but rather reified as deficiencies within the hierarchal structures of Western hegemony (p. 72).

In a similar vein, Daniel Wildcat (Yuchi member of the Muskogee Nation of Oklahoma) (2001) in *Power and Place*, writes that predating human technology, Indigenous knowledge allows for the unseen to be recognized, and is a mindset that does not consign the natural world as an unowned resource to be appropriated, as testified by Onandoga elder, Oren Lyons: “We don’t call a tree a resource; we don’t call a fish a resource. We don’t call a bison a resource. We call them our relatives” (p. 94). In unity with Lyons’ instruction, Wildcat states that our enduring tendency to remain in conversation, and not debate, with the ecology of the land, carries the faculty to gradually widen the pedagogical aperture of how we relationally figure within “indigenous institutions”—underlining the inference that reduced contact with the natural world can limit our intuitive percept, which can result in the decontextualization of meanings imprinted in biological environments. As a further matter, if scholars wish to avoid the misstep of “educational tokenism” (Wildcat, 2001) when writing about Indigenous knowledge, then our research repertoire must remain in contingency with experientially learning through the world. Thereby, challenging the normative, linear, disconnecting, and solitary means to decipher an unwritten code of natural law. In these times, “the relevance of traditional knowledge in the

twenty-first century is predicated on the notion that no matter how ancient our traditional knowledge may be, it offers a potential basis for rebuilding Indigenous communities” (Wilson, 2004, p. 74). Hinged on the “adaptive integrity” of the science of tribal peoples (Barnhardt, 2005), real-world change is possible, particularly if it begins through the forays of decolonizing research (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005).

### **Harmonizing Academic Discord**

The “myopic provincialism” of academia often limits the headway of Indigenous academicians who wish to develop an evolved sense of intellectual sovereignty, particularly as it relates to efficacy, collectivistic goals, and power sharing (Caracciolo, 2000). However, intellectual sovereignty can be redirected from the institution back into tribal communities by looking past the ivy-covered walls, elite discourses, and privileged titles as a means to reconstitute the ideological make-up of producing research.

In tandem with this notion, Mohawk scholar, Taiaiake Alfred’s (2004), articulation on “warrior scholarship” is doggedly defined as “much more than applying a label to ourselves and saying that we are Indigenous. It means looking at the personal and political choices we make every day and applying an Indigenous logic to them” (p. 98). Alfred has also correspondingly expressed the struggle scholars are confronted with, as universities are seen as contentious terrain, in which to meaningfully pursue the indigenization of the academy, in an attempt

to change universities so that they become places where the values, principles and modes of organization and behavior of our people are respected in, and hopefully even integrated into, the larger system of structures and processes that make up the university itself (p. 88).

Unfortunately, converging moral and professional obligations can turbulently materialize as we seek to meld Alfred's vision of warrior scholarship with the intellectual currency of academia, as Native Hawaiian scholar, Julie Kaomea (2004) addresses in the case below:

Indigenous academics who attempt to work and research in our native communities assume a difficult position as we struggle to meet the sometimes competing expectations of the academy and our home communities. For instance, in my experience I have found that while the academy expects that its members will speak from theory, Native Hawaiian communities expect that their members will speak from experience. While the academy expects research relationships will be detached and objective, Native Hawaiian communities expect that these relationships will be intimate and enduring. While the academy expects that its members will contribute to the scholarly community through rigorous intellectualism, Native Hawaiian communities expect that their members will contribute through vigorous activism. (p. 27)

Kaomea's statement captures the adversity and conflicting demands and interests that often entangle our duty as Indigenous academics. Her passage cogently portends the costs associated with belonging to an institution where professional ethics and protocols can interfere with the promises and personal responsibilities we hold toward our tribal communities. Similarly, Deloria and Wildcat (2001) alert us that when our practices mimes the dominant paradigm of research, then "education...seems less and less about shaping responsible and respectful persons and more about the training of professionals" (p. 32).

Speaking back to this vexing circumstance, Duane Champagne (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) proposes that we interlace Western and Native education forms, knowledge and skills "to find culturally unique solutions" as a means to find common ground in "creat[ing] a new synthesis of indigenous and Western knowledge and learning methods" (as cited in Riley, Abu-Saad, & Hermes, 2005, p. 181). A second reply to this pitfall that not only compliments but predates Champagne's words comes from Leigh Kuwanwisiwma of Bacavi, Arizona. Kuwanwisiwma, Director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, was featured in *Beyond the Mesas*, a documentary film on the boarding school experiences of Hopi people. He recounted a

story that occurred in the early 1900's that involved four Hopi chiefs who met with other village leaders to discuss the prospects of Western education for the Hopi. By paying close attention to the words of Chief Looloma, Kuwanwisiwma shared the following vignette:

Looloma said, "it is really futile to resist the white man's way...the way for the Hopi to survive as a culture, is like this: learn how he thinks, learn how he speaks, learn his language...leave the bad things alone. Take the best things of the white man's world, so that we can also survive with it." Finally, he exemplified that by getting two strings together. [Looloma said] "This is the good things of the white man and this is the good of Hopi...Twine them together, and you're going to be twice as strong. That's how Hopi is going to survive" (Kuwanwisiwma, Koyiyumptewa, Gilbert, Eichner, & Holzman, 2006).

This narrative is representative of looking to our communities as a starting place to seek new, yet ancient, tools for learning and knowledge production (Begaye, 2004). Anchored in a tribal vision toward Western education, the "binding," that Loolomah sagely proposes, lays the groundwork for "using our own remedies to respond to colonialism in an Indigenous way to whatever arises" (McCaslin & Breton, 2008, p. 516). In straightforward and plain language, Loolomah offered a way for the Hopi people to acquire a renewed sense of survival by seaming the best of both worlds.

By revisiting and reframing ways of knowing, we begin to recognize that who we are provides the framework to decondition the standard academic manner in which we apprehend truth and cultivate research. One such case can be found in Herbert Benally's (2008) dissertation, *HÓZHQQGO NAASHÁA DOO: Toward a Construct in Navajo Cosmology*. Benally, a Navajo scholar, developed a balancing construct as a derivative of Navajo creations stories, cardinal directions, ceremonies, songs, prayers, natural elements and the universe, as a means to critically review and evaluate projects through a diurnal cycle. He describes the diurnal cycle as a system that guides the purposeful movement of Navajo life where spiritual wellness, livelihood, character development, self-reliance, k'é (clanship and kinship) and profound respect for



creation are aligned with the progression of the day, and the interrelationships therein—when one facet of the man’s constitution is absent, then the other corollaries become weakened, thereby causing imbalance and disharmony to permeate throughout a person’s life. Due to the complexity of his work, I will restrict my concentration to Benally’s matrix, *Relationship Between Man’s Basic Constitution and the Four Areas of Knowledge* (see Figure 3), to emphasize how an anti-positivist rooted methodology, naturally resulting from a Diné life heritage, is a purposeful means to carry out not only research, but a lifeway that gracefully deflects chaos.

The active presence of *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* (SNBH), *Hózhq* and *K’é* are salient traits of Benally’s holistic paradigm. The meaning of SNBH is interpreted as the “holistic and ordered essence of life that encompasses the universe. It is the life force, which is the reason for being and becoming; the pathway for continual learning and the renewal of aspiration” (p. 34). Whereas *Hózhq* is described as a “state of being, state of much good in terms of peace, happiness and plenty” (p. 49), while *K’é*

encompasses emotional ties and relationships associated with the family, extended family, community, nation as a whole, and the natural environment... *K’é* in Navajo conveys love, cherishing, caring, esteem, as well as the simple acknowledgement of the inherent value of others. It is the language of the heart (p.45).

Imbued within the principles of SNBH, *Hózhq*, and *K’é*, is the diurnal process (dawn, day, evening, and night) and man’s basic constitution (*áni’* [mind/emotion], *ntsahkees* [thought], *ats’íis* [body], and *Hooghan* [home/place]). The narrative below displays the disparity between a *Náhookáá Dine’é* (Earth Surface People) modus operandi that is primordially based versus one that is not:

Our grandparents and parents have awoken at dawn prayers and made offerings to the gods who came at dawn, and afterward took their livestock to the field. In the late afternoon, they brought their animals in, and spent the evenings with their families, and

with the yellow twilight they closed the day with a prayer and retired. Contrast that rhythm with contemporary busy life: we wake up to the alarm clock, go on to work, head home as soon as the clock strikes five, watch television, and retire late at night. Compared to our grandparents' lifestyle, our contemporary routine lacks substance (p. 1).

Benally's balancing construct presents an alternative model to reconsider research beyond a conventional process that we master and colonize, to one that holds real promise for culturally and morally strengthening our state of being. He counsels us on its utilitarian value for Navajo people:

The implications of the balancing construct are many; in particular, it challenges current notions of culturally appropriate education and economic policies. By default, decision-makers often insert indigenous values into dominant frameworks for their research and analysis, creating perceived sacrifices of culture for development. The balancing construct inverts this process; it builds a process wherein Western analytic tools are inserted into an overarching Navajo framework and process, reclaiming indigenous knowledge and providing hope that Navajos can continue to live in according to the way of peace and happiness (p. 185).

"Not all knowledge is good" (p. 168), which is all the more reason why frameworks, like Benally's, can serve as a methodological barometer to gauge the likelihood for conflict and the recreation of harm. By reinserting the sacred (SNBH, *k'é* and *hózhǫ́*) back into process of decision-making, outcomes of beauty, peace and harmony will prevail. LaDonna Harris and Jacqueline Wasilewski (2004) note that "the Diné say that human beings get into trouble when they forget certain essential things" (p. 490). As we exist in a time of seeking a "comfortable modern [Indigenous academic] identity" (as Grande, 2004, p. 92), dueling messages of how to attain this have the dangerous potential to lessen our clutch to timeless epistemologies. Put positively, if we desire to faithfully maintain the traditional knowledge of our forebears, we must strive to repurpose its application in Western academia.

## A New Circle of Education

Albeit, a departure from the norm, “educational institutions are sites that can be used in the coordination, creation, and practices of Indigenous projects” (McAlpin, 2008, p.115).

Elements of man's basic constitution	The Four Areas of Knowledge			
	Dawn: Bek'ehgo Da'iinaanii [That which gives to directs life]	Day: Nihigaał [Self-reliance and sustenance]	Evening: Aha'ana'oo'niil [Gathering of family and interpersonal relationships]	Night: Haa'ayíłh dóó hodilzin [Rest and reverence for creation]
Ntsáhákees [thought]	Provides direction and guidance			
Ats'iis [body]		Provides knowledge and skill to maintain health		
Áni' [mind]			Establishes and maintains a healthy mind	
Hooghan [home-places]				Establishes a mutual, respectful relationship with one's home/ environment

Figure 3. Benally, H. (2008) Relationship between man's basic constitution and the four areas of knowledge.

Through the channels of such projects, we are able to pinpoint how Indigenous decolonization can alter people's sensibilities, and how this allows for the building of a new narrative into institutions of higher education (Williams & Tanaka, 2007). The proceeding section will draw from a coterie of scholars that speak to how decolonization can create an empowering university context for Native students. As a footnote, the characterization of empowerment is read through the words of W.G. Tierney (1992) as "a process rooted in social relations and contexts. [Whereby the] [r]ituals of empowerment use the experience of people who have been marginalized to produce an aggressive critique of the prevailing social system" (p. 149).

**Indigenous learning modalities.** Rupturing a recessed niche, a large circle painted blue, represents earth and sky sensibilities, and looms above a large cottonwood drum, while a table that has been retrofitted to accommodate its shape, encircles it. Created by Lakota artist, Sonya Holy Eagle, a citizen of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe, the drum is purposely placed in the center of the Lakota/Dakota room, which is housed in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at South Dakota State University (SDSU) in Brookings, South Dakota (see Figure 4). Professor of Journalism at SDSU, Doris Giago (Oglala Lakota) shares that the Lakota/Dakota room "reflects the culture of our people. The drum has special meaning to Lakota/Dakota people. It is the heartbeat of the people and it was one of the earliest forms of communication. It is appropriate because we are the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism. Today, the drum is used in storytelling. Traditional songs tell a story" (personal communication, March 22, 2010).

Unlocking spatial, relational and temporal thresholds, the institutional milieu is altered as the drum "provide[s] an opening into the Indigenous world" (Williams & Tanaka, 2007, p. 1). The presence of the drum dislodges and decenters "whitestream" ideas of established code of



Figure 4. Lee, R. (personal communication, September 30, 2009). Lakota/Dakota room.

procedures and decorum by returning local tribal protocols of smudging, praying, blessing, and singing to its rightful place; a cultural shift that recontextualizes not only the space, but raises visibility of the Lakota and Dakota people and their everlasting connection to place: “They’re not going to [be presented] as those people that used to be on this land, but...on whose land we stand” (Williams & Tanaka, 2007).

Innately a part of this space is the Lakota worldview of *Mitakuye Oyasin*. The phrase, *Mitakuye Oyasin* (we are all related) is an expression that Tewa educator, Gregory Cajete (2005)

borrowed to describe what he expresses as one of many tribal foundations that inform the basis for human teaching and learning that

reflects the understanding that our lives are truly and profoundly connected to other people and the physical world. Likewise, in tribal education one gains knowledge from firsthand experience in the world and then transmits or explores it through ritual, ceremony, art, and appropriate technology. The individual then uses knowledge gained through these vehicles in the context of everyday living. (p. 70).

“Existing in relationship triggers everything” (p. 221) is what Indigenous epistemologist Manulani Aluli Meyer (2008) conscripts as a nuanced way of “developing [our] own pathway to an idea” (p. 221). Analogous to Meyer’s orthodoxy, Cajete (2005) offers a trove of symbolic constructs that he summarizes as reflecting the philosophical infrastructures that represent methods of coming to know a way of life: “Tree of Life, Earth Mother, Sun Father, Sacred Twins, Mother of Game or Corn, Old Man, Trickster, Holy Wind or Life’s Sake, We Are All Related, Completed Man/Woman, the Great Mystery, Life Way, and Sacred Directions” (p. 73). Similarly, tribal frameworks infused with traditional knowledge and ecologically based knowing have been used to plan, shape and direct the course of research: *Ācimisiwin* (Reder [Cree], 2007), *Biskaabii Dibaajimowin* (McAlpin [Anishinaabe], 2008), *Hózhó Náházdlií* (Emerson [Diné], 2003), *Schalay’nung Sxwey’ga* (Williams [Lil’wat] & Tanaka, 2007), *Whanaungatanga* (Bishop [Kaupapa Māori], 2008), *Mawitowinsiwin* (Battiste [Mi’kmaq], 2002).

Noting the significance of privileging embodied methodologies in research is Saami scholar, Jelena Porsanger (2004) who cites Cheryl Crazy Bull as saying: “[c]ontinuing our use of Western methods would separate us from our understanding; knowledge would be external rather than integrated into our lives if we do not put our own tribal mark on research” (p. 111). Using our own distinct “tribal mark” not only imparts a way to experience our projects differently, but dissolves colonist postures that subjugate Indigenous temporal, spatial and spiritual views, as

Grande (2004) pointedly remarks: “the sacred is not subordinate to the secular, space [is not] subordinate to time, and tradition [is not] subordinate to progress” (p. 72).

So, what are the implications for research, when Indigenous scholars look to traditional modalities as a starting place to begin their work? How does our academic work come into being differently than if they emanated from a process that is denatured, guided by principles that lack positive regard for the next seven generations, and dismiss creative processes, ceremony, love, and hope as sustenance? Cannella and Manuelito (2008) offer their supplication for research bore from these previously “unthought locations”:

This revisioning is especially necessary at a time when science (grounded in the linear notions of knowledge accumulation and progress that actually generate vulnerabilities to simplistic, dualistic thinking) is being attacked by those who would use vulnerabilities to reinscribe power all over us (p. 46).

In examining the question of “what... it mean[s] for indigenous scholars to claim the space of educational research” (Grande, 2008, p. 234), Diné scholar, Larry Emerson offers a conceptual diagram that offers an incisive comparison of using Indigenous and Western learning modalities (personal communication, January 27, 2006) (see Figure 5) that amplifies how learning outcomes manifest differently, according to the approach that is applied to the research process—a mapping that represents a transformational praxis that encourages a renewed sense of self where thinking, unthinking and rethinking of concepts in the world take on new meanings. A critical facet of this illustration is the use of the term “beings” to describe modalities, so as not to “objectify the learner, the learning process and the product” (L. Emerson, personal communication, January 27, 2006). As was mentioned previously in Smith’s (1999) Indigenous research agenda chart, it is imperative to note that here, too, the learning modalities do not represent “goals or ends in themselves [as] [t]hey are processes which can be incorporated into practices and methodologies” (p. 116).

## WESTERN AND INDIGENOUS LEARNING MODALITIES

Parameter	Indigenous	Western
<b>Beings or Tools for Learning</b>	Cedar Tobacco Sage Sweet Grass Corn Pollen Fire, Wind, Light, Earth, Water...	Computers Paper Pencils Pens Classrooms Technology Media
<b>Dimensions of Learning</b>	Emotional Spirit Intuitive Dream Time Physical Cognitive	Cognitive Emphasis
<b>Method</b>	Process Oriented; Intrinsic values are stressed; Learn by doing; Hands-on focus tied to seasons, ceremonial cycles; Social (community) learning focus; Hermeneutics (interpretation) focus	Product Emphasis; Less stress in certain cases on process; Extrinsic values are stressed; Individualistic; Competitive; Economic
<b>Outcomes</b>	Drums Tobacco Cedar Bags Corn Pollen Bags Moccasins Shawls <i>Tacheeh</i> (Sweat Lodge) Fire Pokers Eagle Fan Prayer Sticks, etc.	Profession and Career Emphasis on text Research paper (thesis, dissertation, masters) Books Media Portfolio

*Figure 5.* Emerson, L. (personal communication, January 27, 2006). Western and indigenous learning modalities.



Generally speaking, achieving a level of higher learning falsely connotes a pre-existence to tribal education (Cajete, 2008; Sakiestewa-Gilbert, 2010), or in this case, the use of Indigenous learning modalities in the context of research. The burgeoning corpus of methodological frameworks institutionally deployed to filter research questions, more often than not, triggers a fissure between Indigenous researchers and their projects (Struthers, 2001). The hegemony inherent in many Eurocentric frameworks systematically promotes a form of cognitive imperialism where Indigenous expressions, paradigms and spiritual foundations are silenced, and the pejorative and mechanical language of academia wedges this divide even further (Chen, 1995; Porsanger, 2004; Smith, 1999). Also worth noting is the dearth of literature on Indigenous research designs available through academic publications, affirming the continued privileging of Western epistemologies and paradigms (Walker, 2004). The application of a decolonizing framework, reverently woven with Indigenous learning modalities, are projects that contest the narrowness of the academy, who often require research to be entirely saturated and coated with Western methods, theory and perspectives. Often, the difference that this produces for Native scholars is that it brings about unique ways of receiving answers, cobbling understandings, and applying information (Struthers, 2001). Most notably, it is a departure from Western processes that have the potential to harbor damaging research outcomes that may impede our humanity and social agency. The research experiences of two Native American women will extend the discussion on decolonization by focusing on how Indigenous learning modalities engender restorative and life giving research outcomes.

### **The dialectic of ceremonial research and conventional academic inquiry**

Ojibwe researcher, Roxanne Struthers (2001) discusses in her article, *Conducting Sacred Research*, the visceral nature of her work, as she evacuated a process that was completely

ordered, forced and unnatural to one that was “culturally sensitive, balanced, harmonious, circular, sacred, natural, [and] holistic” (p. 125). While working on her doctoral nursing thesis, Struthers experienced physical, emotional, mental and spiritual depletion. She was undecided about committing to the completion of her program, and had not resolved what the subject matter of her research was going to be. However, after experiencing a vision in a dream, her topic and process unfolded.

Typically, the process of research originates with the selection of a topic. In this case, Struther’s research topic *found her*. The vision she had of three Ojibwe grandmothers, not only affirmed that she move forward in the nursing program, but determined the phenomenological research topic, “The Lived Experience of Ojibwa and Cree Women Healers,” as appropriate and timely. Dreaming, and discovering its meaning and direction, is integral to indigenous ways of knowing, as it offers life enhancing insights into the research process. Similarly, Cajete (2008) explains that, “Dreams, dreaming, and imagination [must be understood] as very unique and powerful ways of learning, understanding, teaching and creating” (p. 490). It is a construct of literacy that is embedded in what Battiste (2008) characterizes as a “holistic ideographic system,” where meanings are spiritually derived, partially known and, with the help of elders and healers are interpreted—this form of data gathering can only be received through spiritual arrangement.

Indigenous peoples, historically, have benefited positively from research, for lack of shared control over processes, interests, needs, priorities and culturally appropriate ethics (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Smith, 1999). However, Struther’s work counters the negative history of research done among indigenous groups, as Ojibwe cultural mores of relationship, reciprocity, responsibility and redistribution established a synergistic bond between the

researcher and the researched (Harris & Wasilewski's, 2004). The researcher sought Ojibwe elders, community members, and healers to set the research agenda, while prayerfulness was used to achieve harmony throughout the process, and assisted the researcher in remaining sanguinely attentive to the purpose of her study. Gifting was also used as an expression of gratitude and respect toward participants for sharing their time, wisdom, energy and whole selves. Struther's research design also entailed the inclusion of traditional Ojibwe modalities to guide and inform her research; research tools, in this indigenous context, included tobacco, sage, sweet grass, and cedar, all of which are fundamentally anchored to Ojibwe ceremonial ways of knowing: "These tools assisted the thesis to unfold in a sacred manner and prescribed the journey traveled" (p. 132). These precepts signal, not only the quality of the relationship between Struthers and the participants, but demonstrate that enacting cultural ground rules can bring about positive interfaces that enrich the dialogical interaction between the researcher and the world.

Struther's work also points to the importance of acknowledging the oppressive manner in which many indigenous students encounter the realm of higher education as a cognitive-only experience. She renders the stronghold of her research process as "being present throughout the process, keeping it whole, and not breaking it into parts [which] affords the possibility of fluidity, innovation, and freshness" (p. 132). Her framework provides an example of how the "gestalt of our knowing" (Meyer, 2008), or balance and spiritual groundedness, is part of the research outcome, when our human faculties and Indigenous modalities are a customary part of the research process. In an effort to further explain this process, Meyer (2008) asserts that "empiricism may begin the process of research, but it is by *no means* the final way in which to engage, experience, or summarize it" (p. 225).

Meyer's contention is further explored in Anishinaabe scholar, Jennifer McAlpin's (2008) dissertation, *Place and Being: Higher Education as a Site for Creating Biskabii-Geographies of Indigenous Academic Identity*. McAlpin anchored her work within a heuristic, auto-ethnographic approach, intertwined with an Indigenous decolonizing process that embodied Diné (*Hózhó náhą́zdlíí*) and Anishinaabe (*Andaa Wenjigewin* and *Mino-Bimaadiziwin*) epistemological frameworks; a methodological bricolage that worked in harmony to "guide [the] research, not in competition-but in cooperation" (p. 2). In her search to answer the question, "what are ways that we can support Native students in higher education" (p. 158), she used a traditional modality process that guided her toward a textual outcome, in addition to an outcome described as *Biskabii*, or a "return to oneself."

Enrolled as a doctoral student in the course *Indigenous Learning and Decolonizing Methodologies*, McAlpin names this as site where critical reflections about concepts, protocols and processes were spurred—as exemplified in her description of how the class ceremonially opened on the first day, with individual introductions and the seating arranged in a circle, and

with the way to the east open, like in the lodge, we engaged our research questions and opened ourselves to the meanings that come from the Indigenous methods of prayer, acknowledging our relations, (and not objectifying), dreaming, and coming together as a "learning community" with the commitments to respect ourselves and each other (pp. 157-158).

Uncharacteristic of the spiritless nature that many Eurocentric approaches to research lack, a new holistic theoretical standpoint is seen as emerging where Western thinking becomes located in the context of tribal traditions; thereby, "allow[ing] for complete understanding of a [research] problem or a phenomenon" (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 125). The literal way the students entered their work through an eastern doorway, formed a purposeful path toward "knowing," where the sacred was not suppressed (Walker, 2003), and traditional knowledge became the

underpinning of how a theory of knowledge and learning processes were developed (Battiste, 2002). It was in this way that McAlpin's theoretical framework began to take shape.

Western research methods often provide incomplete guidance, exteriorize the researcher from the research, robs the agency of animate living systems, offers dispassionate professional jargon and, overall, involve a "forced fit," as Walker (2003) expounds:

forcing Indigenous researchers to fit their approach [entirely] within Western paradigms ignores the premise that all research paradigms have a specific cultural foundation. All modes of scientific thought are culturally based, including Western science, yet many Western researchers continue to conduct research as though the cultural foundations of their paradigms and methodologies were universal (p. 37).

Conversely, McAlpin's sentient approach was comprised of spiritual groundwork and a restorative language to guide and carry the vision of her work:

For the Beautyway researcher, there is no reason to question or seek knowledge (there is no word for "research" in Diné bizaad) if it does not lead to a restoration of *Hózhó* (harmony and peace). Likewise, *Anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* or *kendasswin* (knowledge) itself for the Anishinaabe is defined as that which leads one to *Mino-Bimaadiziwin*, the good way of life (p. 123).

McAlpin also relied heavily on the scholarly works of Battiste (2000), Colorado (1994), Emerson (2003), Geniusz (2006), Hampton (1995), Johnson (2001), Rheault (1999), Simons (2002), Smith (1999), and Whelshula (1999), who cogently affirm Indigenous-centered traditional knowledge and decolonized learning as critical aspects of the recovery process in higher education. Moreover, she remarks that such culturally distinctive research techniques, since time immemorial, have been reenacted in Native communities to deal with life's vicissitudes (Benally, 2008) and do not "reify the multigenerational trauma that colonization engenders" (McAlpin, 2008, p. 109-110).

Pivotal in pushing the process of decolonization was the unfettered infusion of plant life, a ceremonial lodge, as well as dreaming, prayers and songs. In activating volitional connections

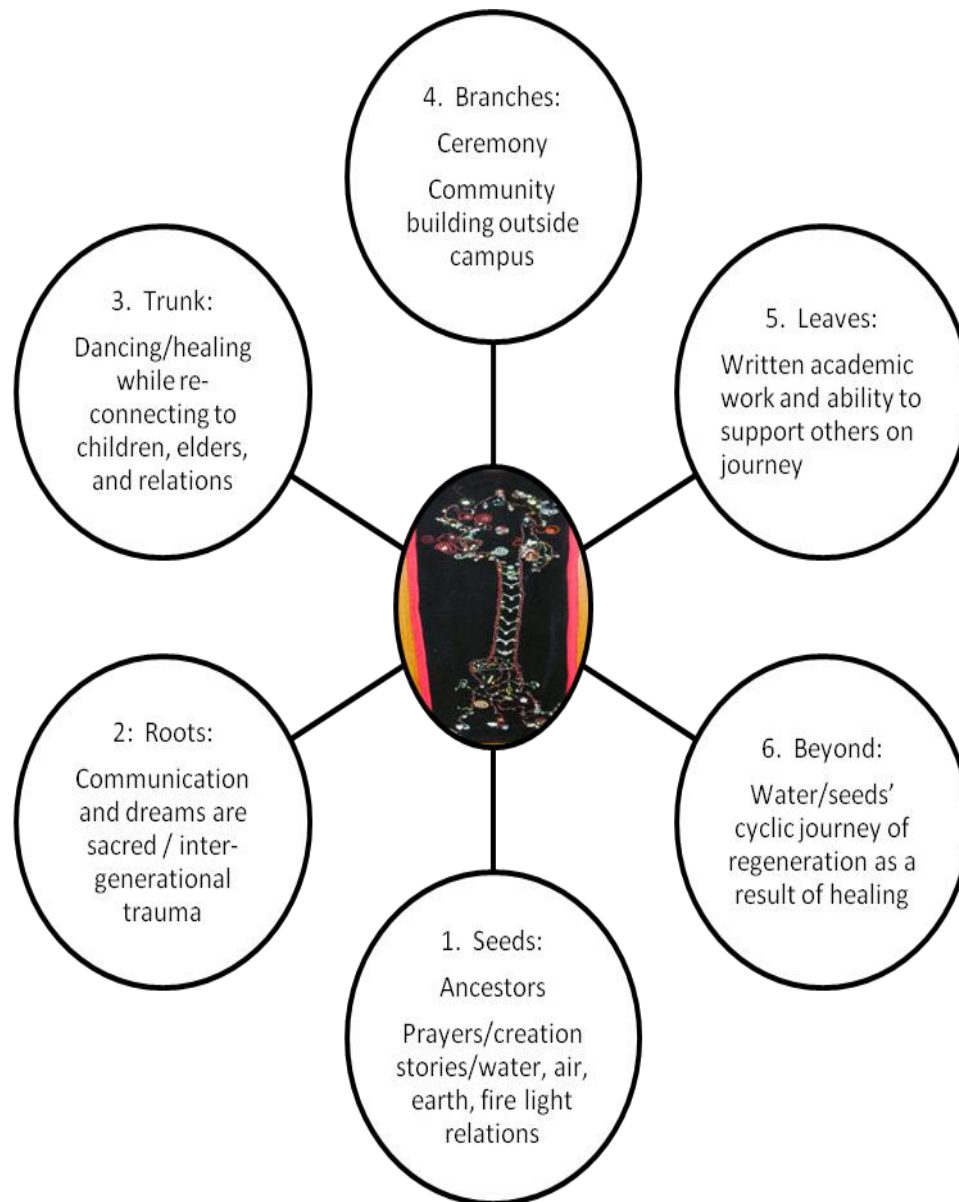


Figure 6. McAlpin, J. (2008). Indigenous academic identity growth process.

to her ancestors and non-human relatives to reoccupy a space of spiritual counsel, these spiritual gestures resultantly led her to craft a hand beaded indigenous learning modality: *Mitig*—the lifeblood of her research. The *Mitig*, also referred to in her work as the “tree of life,” “dream tree,” “tree process,” and “being,” was a veritable force in achieving the paradigm, “Indigenous Academic Identity Growth Process” (see figure 6). Oneida scholar, Pam Colorado speaks to the special nature of this scientific labor:

For a western-educated audience the notion of a tree with a spirit is a difficult concept to grasp- [i.e.,] the universe is alive. Therefore, to see a Native speaking with a tree does not carry the message of mental instability; on the contrary, this is a scientist engaged in research! (as cited in McAlpin, 2008, p. 142).

Created in her image, the *Mitig* is seen as a non-objectified extension of McAlpin’s creative self in that it embodies life meanings, journey, and story. The “dream tree” is both a statement of the past, present, and future brought about through the use of the researcher’s intuitive processes, which yielded clarity and insight to mold her understanding of how to answer her research question. As illustrated in her diagram of post-secondary student development, the *Mitig* is seated centrally and fosters dialogic action among the spheres of spirituality, geography, history, identity, time, and space. The “tree of life” serves as a cultural metaphor to nurture the development and growth of Indigenous students, where all parts of their “being” (seeds, roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and beyond) must be equally supported to ensure prosperity, balance and harmony. In truth, what the *Mitig* offers is a positive remedy to transcend the continuity of dysfunction seemingly inherent in academic settings (Alfred, 2004, Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004).

Just as Grande (2008) describes “Red Pedagogy” as a method or technique not to be memorized or prescribed, the use of traditional modalities is comparable to this descriptor in that it defies expectations where the learner does not encounter a predefined or predetermined lens, theory, paradigm, or practice. Instead, the learner, usually for the first time in his/her academic

career, is challenged to consider a course of action and methods in meaning-making, where the researcher not only becomes a part of the process, but is changed by the process. While Battiste (2008) has noted the “fatal abeyance” of Indigenous knowledge in educational systems, processes, policies and practices, McAlpin’s (2008) work pioneers major headway in coming to voice how “higher education [can operate] as a site for recovery and restoration” (p. 3).

Returning to where this section emanated, Doris Giago (Oglala Lakota) describes the many contexts in which the circle is understood, according to the worldview of the Lakota: “the hoop of life,” “birth to adulthood,” “old age to death,” “unity and harmony,” “all the forces of the universe – the sun, moon and stars” (personal communication, March 22, 2009). In *Black Elk Speaks*, Lakota medicine person, Black Elk, envisioned how these cyclic constructs connect to fashion the Sacred Hoop:

for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and starlight (Neihardt as cited by Harris & Wasilewski, 2004, p. 496)

Drawing on the prophetic words of Black Elk, and what LaDonna Harris and Jacqueline Wasilewski term as the “hoop of hoops,” the circle is a dialogic and synergistic space where those of us who choose to participate can do so through thoughts and actions naturally rooted in the living methodologies and pedagogies of our communities. In stressing this notion, these authors ardently call upon Indigenous communities to rely on their own hoop of understanding in “finding patterns of effective interaction where we can discover, share and coordinate our mutual value[s]” (p.496), in an effort to mediate our next steps. In this manner, Cajete (2005) offers conclusive insight of Black Elk’s vision:

For American Indians a new circle of education is evolving that is founded on the roots of tribal education and reflective of the needs, values, and sociopolitical issues as Indian people themselves perceive them. This new circle encompasses the importance that



American Indian people place on the continuance of their ancestral traditions. It emphasizes a respect for individual uniqueness in the diversity of expressions of spirituality, facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of history and culture, develops a strong sense of place and service to community, and forges a commitment to educational and social transformation that recognizes and further empowers the inherent strength of American Indian people and their respective cultures (p. 77).

## **Summary**

A hallmark of decolonization is that it is neither a monocultural concept, nor is it “a job for two people, but for entire nations and peoples, and many paths are needed” (McCaslin & Breton, 2008, p. 529); an entreaty that pushes for a critical multilogical context where unhealed trauma, at the macro and micro levels, can become part of what commissions the methodological process. That being so, new ways nestled in millinea-old understandings have the medicinal power to be the decolonizing locus where ideas can begin to shift from “research to renewal, fragment to whole” (Meyer, 2008, p. 217). In this notion, lies a muddy journey indivisibly ridden from uncertainty, grief, mourning, exhaustion, fear, laughter, and celebration—an unmanicured path less traveled by those unwilling to undergo pain before healing. And yet, a tardy entrance through this framework’s vestibule is virtually non-existent because decolonizing methodologies, much like “community...always provides a space for people to return” (Deloria, 1999, p. 142).

As scholars, like myself, have come to acknowledge our projects as being a spirited charge to reawaken ourselves so we may “stand up again” (Alfred, 2005), we need to be reminded that we are not the first generation of heroic scholars to endure the struggle of breaking new ground away from the scholarly mainstream (Miheuah & Wilson, 2004). In uniting ourselves with our academic predecessors we, too, undoubtedly consider research as sacred work—an investigative labor undergirded by the deliberate placement of ourselves, not apart from our work, but at the center, beginning at the sunwise direction to the east. Keeping in stride

with those who have written about resisting the mires of Western academic styles of research, Diné educator, Larry Emerson, compendiously utters what has been shared throughout this chapter: “We are not inventing something new. We are just relying on what has always been there. We are not proposing a new paradigm. The answer has always been here” (Thorpe, 1996, p. 219).

## Chapter 3

### Methodology of Hózhó

*To the east:*

*We ask that we reevaluate ourselves,  
Our values and our belief systems...*

*To the south:*

*We ask that we live long happy lives,  
Perceiving aspects of “right” and “not right” decisions  
and the consequences that await us with each decision...*

*To the west:*

*We ask that we remember our connections  
To every other being by acknowledging our clan structure...  
May we remember to set goals, according to our needs, wants, and wishes...*

*To the north:*

*We ask that we continue to have hope, respect and reverence:  
Of and about nature...*

*“What are some ways...to solve our daily problems as T’áá Diné?”  
And may we, through this process, feel assured of our capabilities...*

*With these thoughts in mind  
We make our final turn  
And again: Face the west  
And thereupon re-enter our Hooghan*

*I am that which is: A Navajo Person...  
T’áá Diné Nishłi—Della Frank, T’áá Diné Nishłi*

### A Preliminary Discussion of Hózhó

Anishinaabe scholar D'Arcy Ishpemingenzaabid Rheault (2000) proclaims: “We live in a time when new generations are gradually beginning to discuss their traditions in new ways” (p. 2). This is particularly true in regard to the materialization of new research paradigms that are not only predicated on cultural mores, but serve as dignified channels to “invigorate and animate

Indigenous languages, cultures, knowledge, and vision in academic structures” (Battiste, 2000, p. xxi).

While I fully acknowledge that Western methodologies are needed to conduct research, Native researchers need to find answers to our own problems in our own way. This view has remained a standpoint continually and emphatically expressed by contemporary Indigenous scholars (Battiste 2000, 2002, 2008; Begaye, 2004; Benally, 2008; Bishop, 2008; Cajete, 2005; Clark, 2009; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Duran & Duran, 1995; Emerson, 2003; Harris & Wasilewski, 2004; Haskie, 2002; Martin, 2003; McAlpin, 2008; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Porsanger, 2004; Smith, 1999; Struthers, 2001; Walker, 2003; Wilson, 2008; Williams & Tanaka, 2007). What’s more, this recognition stems from ancestral responses concerning how to go about searching for answers, information, knowledge, and truth, as Arikara storyteller, Hand, explains: “This will give an idea to all, how the Arikara originated under the earth. Yet it seems a mystery to us, and it is for us to solve” (Dorsey as cited by Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 25). Contextualizing the discourse that surrounds his statement, Creek scholar K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty (2006) offer some illuminating commentary:

Hand minces no words in his powerful statement of Arikara intellectual property. Clearly, he anticipates a large, interested audience when he addresses his story “to all.” He signals that their understandings will be partial, only “an idea,” a glimpse of how the Arikara world came to be. Hand warns us: This story is hard to understand; it is a mystery. Mysteries demand intellectual engagement; they do not give up their lesson easily to the dilettante. Hence, “it is for us to solve.” Hand’s statement is one of ultimate ownership – “it is up to us” – but also of ultimate learner responsibility. Hand is saying “it is *up* to *us* to solve”; it is our profound responsibility as Arikara, learning to be fully Arikara, to solve this mystery (p. 25).

In view of the foregoing statement, my intent is to remain true to who I am as a Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa and Sahnish woman and not abandon the promises and responsibilities that I hold toward my communities. So these intentions are not subverted, this work must be placed

within a methodology that possesses a healing propensity that not only protects and nurtures my emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual wellbeing, but serves as a “textual place” (Somerville, 2007) that allows me to produce self-determinate and culturally autonomous research. Therefore, it is imperative that I select a research paradigm that is in compliance with principles of humanization, and is a design where indigenous decolonization, natural law and traditional knowledge are not eclipsed by a colonial process and method. On that ground, my motivation for this decision is ardently shared by McAlpin (2008):

The colonial method is typified by a separation of the researcher from the researched. It disregards Indigenous ways of knowing and is focused on primarily recognizing mental aspects of being, as spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects are often ignored. I am rejecting the colonial method, because I want this research to address the whole notion of culture, include and strengthen Indigenous ways of knowing, be relevant to the experience of Native students and include mental, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual elements of understanding...I am choosing the decolonial method because it embraces healing, recovery, survival, and restoration (p. 110).

Hence, I will employ a Beautyway methodology to bring this research to life. As a decolonizing research paradigm, it changes the tenor of how I may otherwise derive a sense of direction of how to initiate and proceed with my work vis-à-vis *Hózhó*. “The foundation of the Navajo world begins with the concept *Sa’ahnaagháíí bik’eh hózhóón nishlóo nasháa doo* (The word *hózhó* means the same as this phrase)” (Denetdale, 2006, p. 84). *Hózhó* is also referenced as “Beautyway,” “Beautyway Pathway,” “Blessing Way,” “Corn Pollen Pathway,” “*Hózhóqji*,” “*Hózhó náházdíí*,” and “Walk in Beauty” (Benally, 2008; Clark, 2009; Emerson, 2003; Goodluck, 1998; Haskie, 2002; Lee, 2004; McAlpin, 2008) and is related to balance according to the diurnal process, which is represented by the phrase “*Hózhóqgo naasháa doo*” (Benally, 2008). A polysemous life way concept, Navajo scholar, Miranda Haskie (2002) offers an explanation of the characteristics that often comprise *Hózhó*:

*Hózhó* is a state of happiness and beauty (Griffin-Pierce, 1992). The Navajo term, [Hózhó], “includes everything that a Navajo thinks is good...it expresses for the Navajo such concepts as the words ‘beauty,’ ‘perfection,’ ‘harmony,’ ‘goodness,’...‘success,’ ‘well-being,’ ‘blessedness,’ ‘order,’ [and] ‘ideal’” (Wyman, 1970, p. 7). According to Kluckhorn (1968), [H]ózhó is probably the central idea in Navajo...thinking...[and] is frequently repeated in almost all prayers and songs...it is best translated as ‘beautiful,’ ‘harmonious,’ ‘good,’ ‘blessed,’ ‘pleasant,’ and ‘satisfying’” (p. 686). Witherspoon (1974) referred to [H]ózhó as a “positive or ideal environment” (p. 54)...[I]ndividuals can spend their entire lifetime trying to achieve the state of [H]ózhó (pp. 27-28).

It is also necessary to point out that the reading of *Hózhó* is not limited to reverent petitions:

[Hózhó] is not something that occurs only in ritual song and prayer, it is referred to frequently in everyday speech...It is used in reminding people to be careful and deliberate, and when [s/]he says good-bye to someone leaving, [s/]he will say *hózhóógó nanináa doo* “may you walk or go about according to *hózhó* (Witherspoon as cited by Farella, 1984, p. 16).

Implicit in this holistic and highly complex concept is a corresponding nomenclature of harmony and beatitude, which are intrinsically linked to a Navajo existence of wellness.

Coloring this understanding is the holism and tautology innately a part of the linguistic landscape of *Diné Bizaad* (Navajo language) (Begay & Maryboy, 1998). Hence, a reader may not readily grasp the holistic nature of the Navajo worldview when repetitious ascriptions are systematically excluded. To this point, an explanation of the duplicative nature of Diné cultural constructions can be found within the etymology of the Navajo language:

According to the understanding of our forefathers, our language began in the First World that is Black World. Through the mysterious act of the Holy People came a thought, by this thought there was a sound. Through this sound a voice came into existence. This voice became the creation of the Diné language. Through the thought and sound of voice came four basic words, which became the main spirit, roots and foundation of the Diné language. These four basic words gave birth to twelve more words, which rooted the Diné language (Aronlith as cited by Said, 2004, p. 4).

While *Bilagáana Bizaad* (English language) has remained the privileged vernacular for scholarship (Altbach, 2008), employing *Diné Bizaad* (Navajo language) provides a deeper

comprehension of concepts in the world that *Bilagáana Bizaad* may otherwise smokescreen and misrepresent (Walters, 1993)—my rationale for its use.

Therefore, indicative of the Diné worldview, I am choosing to “walk in beauty” in regard to the manner in which I think, plan, and carry out this research. I will draw from the wellspring of Diné scholars and lay emphasis on specific aspects of the Navajo worldview as a means to provide a systematic discussion of what would comprise a Beautyway methodology and the methods that would be appropriate to use in its scholarly investigation. By tethering this understanding to a methodological framework not guided by Western elitism, but from the genius within Native communities (Haskie, 2002), recalibrates my research agenda by privileging traditional philosophy, knowledge and learning modalities as an Indigenous critical lens through which to develop this project. At the same time, the written formulation of what the evolving complexion of a Beautyway methodology equals for me should not be seen as a corollary to *Hózhó*; rather, it is the holy manner in which this information is processed through my methodology that *Hózhó* may ultimately be achieved (McAlpin, 2008).

By imparting a means to uphold *Hózhó* as a process guarantees to not lead me astray by degenerative principles that may collapse hope for a positive research outcome. The avoidance of material damage of my welfare, and all other parties that may be impacted by this project, is a motivating factor for using a process that is devoid of methodological imprecations that may deter a positive outcome for this dissertation, or what Austin (2009) refers to in Navajo as *Naayéé*—a harmful interruption of the rhythm of daily life by negative forces, which can manifest itself as one of many modern social ills that can cause disharmony. Therefore, given that “Indigenous research poses the same threats to the Indigenous community as does non-Indigenous research” (Weber-Pillwax as cited by Wilson, 2008, p. 60), it holds that I respond to

this point with a living research process that is epistemologically sound and does not “de-soul” (Parry, 2008) the nature of my being.

### **Clark’s Glossary of Key Navajo Terms**

In his dissertation, *In Becoming Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hozhoon: The Historical Challenges and Triumphs of Diné College*, former Diné College President, Ferlin Clark (2009) provides a list of terms that serve not only as nation-specific markers for assessment of teaching, learning, and (in this case) researching in accordance to a Navajo lifeway, but is also useful in articulating concepts that are unshakably a part of this work. Moreover, they not only represent an impassioned directive to steer my scholarship by methodological and pedagogical theories of knowledge firmly rooted in primordial educational systems, they evoke me to critically value Indigenous models of critique and inquiry as a means to truly think in terms of a Beautyway scholar:

*Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón (SNBH)* is...“The duality of knowledge in form of male and female [that] are present in mother earth and father sky. These are the foundations of teaching and learning” (Diné College Board of Regents Resolution, DC-FEB-1900-08, February 9, 2008). SNBH designates “the Diné traditional living system, which places human life in harmony with the natural world and the universe...As a process, SNBH is represented “with domains as *Nitsáhákees* [thinking], *Nahat’á* [planning], *Iiná* [implementing], and *Siih Hasin* [assessing] (Diné College Self Study Report, 2008, p. 7). At Diné College, the “mission is to apply the *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* principles to advance quality student learning: through *Nitsáhakees*, *Nahatá*, *Iiná* and *Siih Hasin*”(Diné College Catalog, 2006-2007, p. 3).

*Nitsáhákees*...is the act or process of thinking. Thinking derives from the early dawn light spirit and contains powerful energy that creates movement and therefore requires respect and care (Benally, 1990, p. 7(1))...*Nitsáhákees* “represents yesterday and Navajo culture and language” (Diné College Self Study Report, 2008, p. 7). The Early Dawn spirit symbolizes the east where good thoughts, sound mind, physical fitness, and mental strength originate (Aronilth, 1991, p. 28).

*Nahat’á*... represents plans for “today, teaching, and learning,” as well as the interaction between thinking and planning for self and others (Diné College Self Study Report, 2008,



p. 7). The term *Nahat'á* also derives from the word *Naatanii* (leader). Leadership equates with representing one's family, community, organization, or nation. It also represents the goals and objectives that the person designated envisions for himself/herself and others in the best interest of everyone, including the tribe.

*Iiná*...means living, or following one's mature life...In terms of Diné College's institutional process, *Iiná* "represents tomorrow and family, kinship and community" (Diné College Self Study Report, 2008, p. 7). Aronilth explains that the west is associated with the spirit of Yellow Evening Twilight, and that "life is a journey and each of us has a different amount of time which to travel" (Aronilth, 1991, p. 1). *Iina* means implementation or activation of thoughts and plans into action.

*SiihHasin*...is wisdom gained from tested experience, skill, knowledge, and understanding. *Siih Hasin* is represented by *bááshzhinii* (black jet), *Nihodillhił* or *Cha'halheel* (night), *Náhook-s* (north), *Dibé Nitsáá* (Mt. Hesperus), *Haigo* (winter), and old age. Diné College equates *Siih Hasin* with assurance, reflection, evaluation, and "represents the future and physical, spiritual and intellectual well-being" (Diné College Self Study Report, 2008, p. 7). Aronilth explains that the north spirit represents Folding Darkness and that it is "for positive self awareness to protect us from danger and evil" (Aronilth, 1991, p. 33).

*Hozhooji*...teachings encourage generosity, kindness, respect for self, kinship, clanship, regard for others, values, learning traditional knowledge, reverence of and care for speech, listening, thankfulness, balanced mental perspective, optimism, displaying a proper sense of humor, maintaining strong reverence of self, being enthusiastic and motivated, and caring for one's work (Jim, 1996)..."*Hozhooji* naatani means the beauty way of leadership and is generally female; it is concerned with domestic affairs like animals, children, home, land, and clan issues" (Begay, 1997, p. 42).

*Naayéjei*...means protection from negative thoughts, an improper attitude, inappropriate behavior, and overindulgence that leads to imbalance and disharmony. Some *Naayéjei* teachings include: "Never be fearful, never be impatient, do not be hesitant, never be easily hurt, never be overly emotional, do not be overly reluctant, never be overly argumentative, do not overburden the self, do not be shy, do not get mad easily, do not carry around expectations of negative circumstances" (Jim, 1996).

Tradition...means the customs, culture and traditions of Diné people, including songs, prayers, and ceremonies. Traditional Diné ceremonies are those found in the Blessing Way and Protection Way ceremonies.

Culture...in Diné life means the language, songs, ceremonies, and prayers, both traditional and contemporary that are part of the Diné way of life. Diné traditional culture means the ethos (values and beliefs) of the Diné people.

Cultural History...examines the past, present, and even the future life of a group of people. It can consist of the interpretation of records, oral traditions, narratives, customs,

arts, and knowledge from the past to the present of human societies or of a particular culture.

Duality – *Alchi Silah*... are the principles of male and female, night and day, negative and positive, and other inter-dependent, inter-related, and inter-linked elements, where often conflict and harmony co-exist, which also considers that for action there is a reaction, and which is contained within the unique Diné term of *Sa 'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* as well as within prayers, songs, and ceremonies (pp. 86-91).

As a Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa and Sahnish woman, these branches of knowledge guide not only how I strive to live my life, but various phases of my research work, as exemplified within the spheres of *Nitsáhákees* (Thinking), *Nahat'á* (Planning), *Iiná* (Living), and *Siihasin* (Assuring). *Nitsáhákees*, “related to the east direction” (Begay & Maryboy, 1998), involves the mindfulness I have prudently devoted to the pre-natal stage of my work, where prayers, ceremonies and dreams continue to assist me in critically assessing conceptual steps as a Beautyway researcher. *Nahat'á*, “related to the south direction” (Begay and Maryboy, 1998), concerns the adherence to “*Diné bi'i'ool'įįł* or a Diné Life Way” (Austin, 2009) approach as a means to ensure accountability and fidelity to the research process that uses Beautyway methods to facilitate the overall design and outcome of my research. *Iiná*, “related to the west direction” (Begay & Maryboy, 1998), is best expressed as lovingly respecting existing sets of webbed relations that are human, universal, and spiritual as a means to avoid committing cultural improprieties (Austin, 2009), and ensures that *Náhookáá Dine'é* (Earth Surface People) principles for living are not deemphasized by standard methodological conventions of academia. Finally, *Siihasin*, “related to the north direction” (Begay & Maryboy, 1998), entails bringing to life a once imaginative scope and vision of my research into a textual being that may be useful for emerging scholars who wish to privilege their own cultural antecedents, as a means to breathe a deeper knowing and understanding into their work. “The root of *[S]iihasin* is *[S]in*, (or *[Z]in*) a morpheme that can mean song or prayer (as in *[S]odizin*). *[S]in* implies an outcome: to think, to

know, to want, an ultimate achievement...a transformative experience” (Begay and Maryboy, 1998, p. 63).

It is necessary to acknowledge that I do not proclaim to fully comprehend the complexity that underlies *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* (SNBH), as my limited understanding is derived from what has been shared with me by family, tribal pedagogues, and colleagues. However, I recognize that SNBH is a cultural measure to dictate behavioral appropriateness associated with how Diné men and women think, speak and act within all realms of life. “Scholars including myself should not go beyond that realization. SNBH can only be clearly understood in the Diné language with a Diné chanter providing the necessary explanations and understandings” (Lee, 2004, p. 137).

### **Diagrams of Diné Knowledge**

*The ultimate test of each human educational system is a people’s survival*

—K. Tsianina Lomawaima & T. L. McCarty, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*

In the privation of *Hózhó*, Navajo people often look to episodes of *Diné Bahané* (Diné creation stories) to reinculcate ourselves in how to emerge from discord (L. Emerson, personal communication, April 22, 2010). Within these narrations, the formation of *Diné Bizaad* (Navajo language), the birth of *Asdzáá Nádleehé* (Changing Woman), the creation of the four original clans known as *Kinya’áanii* (Towering House), *Honágháhnii* (One Who Walks Around), *Hashtlishnii* (Mud People), and *Tódich’íi’nii* (Bitter Water), the making of day and night and the four seasons, the building of the first hogan and sweat lodge, as well as the origination of animals and ceremonies are some of the many special events that occurred within these stories (Lee, 2004; Morris, 1997). A natural offshoot of my framework, Clark (2009) offers a cursory view of our creation narratives and our successive upward travel through a series of underworlds

(*Ni'Hodilhil* also known as First World, Black World and Black Air; *Ni'Hoodootliizh*, referred to as Second World, Blue World and Blue Air; *Ni' Haltsoh* recognized as Third World or Yellow Air), into the current world we call *Ni'Halgai* (also known as the Fourth World and White or Glittering World):

Diné origin stories of *Hajiinei* (the emergence), told through oral accounts, describe an evolution through four worlds and Diné believe that origin stories can only be absorbed through one's life time and not through books or tapes (Glenabah Hardy, Personal Communication, December 26, 2008)...The Diné people emerged upward through those four worlds with no particular date attached, but only as four ancient events, which endure as lessons and teachings for the Diné people to know (Irene H.Clark, Personal Communication, October 25, 2008) (p. 92).

He goes on to define the prevailing thesis of this historical migration:

The teachings from these stories implant appropriate respect for the clan system and regulate proper relationships, or "*K'e*" among the Diné people. During the time of creation, various ceremonies emerged to correct the disharmony that would confront the Diné people. These ceremonies were conducted to preserve and restore order among the elements and with the Diné people for all time. In keeping with these narratives and through the use of Blessing and Protection Way ceremonies, order and balance were restored whenever disharmony occurred. In most, if not all the stories, the improper action of animals as well as of individual Diné was corrected so that harmony, "*hozho*," could be restored through ceremonies and oral teachings...Those stories serve as a reminder to the Diné of historical events, and they bestow wisdom, knowledge, and guidance about proper ethical and moral character and behavior (Irene H. Clark, Personal Communication, December 25, 2008; Glenabah Hardy, Personal Communication, December 26, 2008; Tommy Singer, Personal Communication, January 1, 2009; Yazzie, 1971; Roessel, 1971; Aronilth, 1980; Zolbrod, 1984; Mitchell, 2001) (pp. 102-103).

Likewise, Haskie (2002) takes into consideration that once *Hózhó* and *K'é* (kin connection with all that exists) fail to be lived out within the "self," and among the "family, community, cultural group, nation, and the universe" (p. 39), what undoubtedly follows is "living in disharmony, experiencing loss, and the existence of inequalities" (p. 75). With this in mind, Benally (2008) discusses how the *Hózhóqji* or Blessing Way ceremony is not only foundational to all other major ceremonies, but is a pre-existing ceremony designed to wholly restore and

bless an individual. By taking into account that Blessing Way<sup>5</sup> teachings are planted in our world as a way to facilitate a healthful engagement and connection with life, Benally stresses that “a familiar and safe epistemological construct” (p. 26) is necessary if scholars, like myself, wish to involve ourselves with Diné decolonizing research processes—an issue that garners complete unanimity from a group of Diné elders belonging to the communities of Chilchinbeto and Chinle, Arizona:

If an individual fails to live according to these values, it is said *doo ntsékees da* [he does not think], and this question is asked: *hahgoshá tsízdookos* [when will he start thinking?]. A person may have many academic degrees, but when he neglects his moral obligations a Navajo would say, *ayóo dó' ntsíjíkees lá dó' ha'ní* [I thought they said he could think.] (pp. 132-133).

Extending this awareness is *Shicheii*, Larry Emerson, who, in assisting my effort to achieve an articulation of a Beautyway methodology, explained to me that the Blessing Way emphasizes all that is good about Diné people and speaks to the best ways in which to live our lives. He goes on to say that our way of existence is a continuation of Navajo creation narratives, where our journey from *Ni'Hodilhil* (First World) into *Ni'Halgai* (Fourth World) is an unfolding story that remains uninterrupted, despite the insertion of colonization. While Western discernment has helped me obtain certain understandings of how to approach the production of scholarship, Blessing Way thinking is a mindset that provides me with better judgment of the far-reaching effects that my research carries, as it is inseparable from all other aspects of creation (L. Emerson, personal communication, September 27, 2011). Hence, my purpose, here, is to acknowledge *Hózhóqji*—a representation of “all good energies” (Lee, 2011, p. 11)—as a ceremony that inherently guides my interpretations of this methodology.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix X

To that extent, Diné traditional educational models offer a restorative way to assess, evaluate and make decisions that are ceremonially and genealogically centered. Within the context of biculturalism, such paradigms can prove to be useful especially as students, like myself, encounter a “two-worlding” (Darder, 1998) experience where the measure of progress has the potential to be misaligned according to colonial standards. The following cultural referents (see Figures 7, 8, 9, & 10) introduce a unique feminine dimension to this project that not only carry life meanings, but transfer onto other concepts in the universe and define the moral order of how to act within it; or in this instance, how I have undertaken the material practice of Indigenous scholarship.

In possessing the capacity to think, feel, smell, taste, hear and see, each Navajo modality contains pragmatic implications at every phase of education and life, and are encoded with unexpendable life sustaining principles that continue to retain relevance to this day, as we seek happiness and a long life (Clark, 2009). As an outgrowth of this point, I do not claim to fully know the divine properties that each diagram holds, because they offer pluralistic and endless teachings based on one’s intimate experience of living through various life phases. Out of respect for the sacred, I offer only a partial understanding of each visual rendering, as my intent is to emphasize how Diné-based methods of knowing articulate my methodology. In short, because “I am empirically configured by my past...my senses and my body were the tools and recording devices through which I retrieved and stored all data” (Meyer, 2008, p. 220). Said another way, my cultural senses, as interposed by directional iterations of *Hózhó*, constitute my methodology.

**Ha’a’aaah (East): Hoghaan.** Signifying where life begins, the doorway of a *Hoghaan* (see Figure 7)—without variation—always faces east. The schematization of the inner constitution of the hogan illustrates the internal movement as clockwise and cyclical, while the

ritual placement of people, traditional modalities, and fire is diagramed as a pictorial annotation of a gathering titled, *Na'abidikid: Nitsahakees doo Nahat'a* (To Inquire: Mindfulness and Self-Directed Knowing) hosted in *Tsedaak'aan*, Diné Nation, New Mexico in May of 2009. It is with the consensual authorization of those who attended that I have elected to use one of several hogan dialogues as a research technique involving a collective effort in articulating the nature of knowledge creation as a relational entity created in community (Wilson, 2008).

The hogan “is a place of conception, birth, growth, [and] development” (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 53) and, thusly, is regarded as a mother, because this is where Diné people garner strength and knowledge (Clark, 2009). Appropriate to this description, myself and four other graduate students, with indigenous roots that grow from Croatia, Mexico, the Phillipines and various tribal nations of North America, engaged in a meaningful “hemispheric conversation” (Meyer, 2010) and within this context, critically reflected and “interrogate[d] both our individual and collective actions, to consider the most effective approaches to study and struggle, and to consider if there is something we can do differently to improve our efforts to know and participate in our world” (Darder, 2002, p. 104).

Five consecutive days of meditative contemplation, replete with prayers, songs, sunrise and sweat lodge ceremonies, and the use of Indigenous learning modalities, ultimately resulted in the formation of research principles harvested by our lived truths. What follows is a personal recapitulation of those guideposts:

Foremost, in regard to research, we are accountable to our primogenitors as well as our unborn descendants. The outgrowth of this acknowledgement rears the requisite to cultivate methods that assist in the maintenance and the function of the world in the manner of 'beauty' so we, as Indigenous researchers, do not recreate harm within the overlapping spatial ambits of the past, present and future.

In keeping our research protocol clear, our procedure for gathering and interpreting data will continue to rise from our partnership with the natural world. In becoming friends with the land again, non-human persons from the natural world will serve as

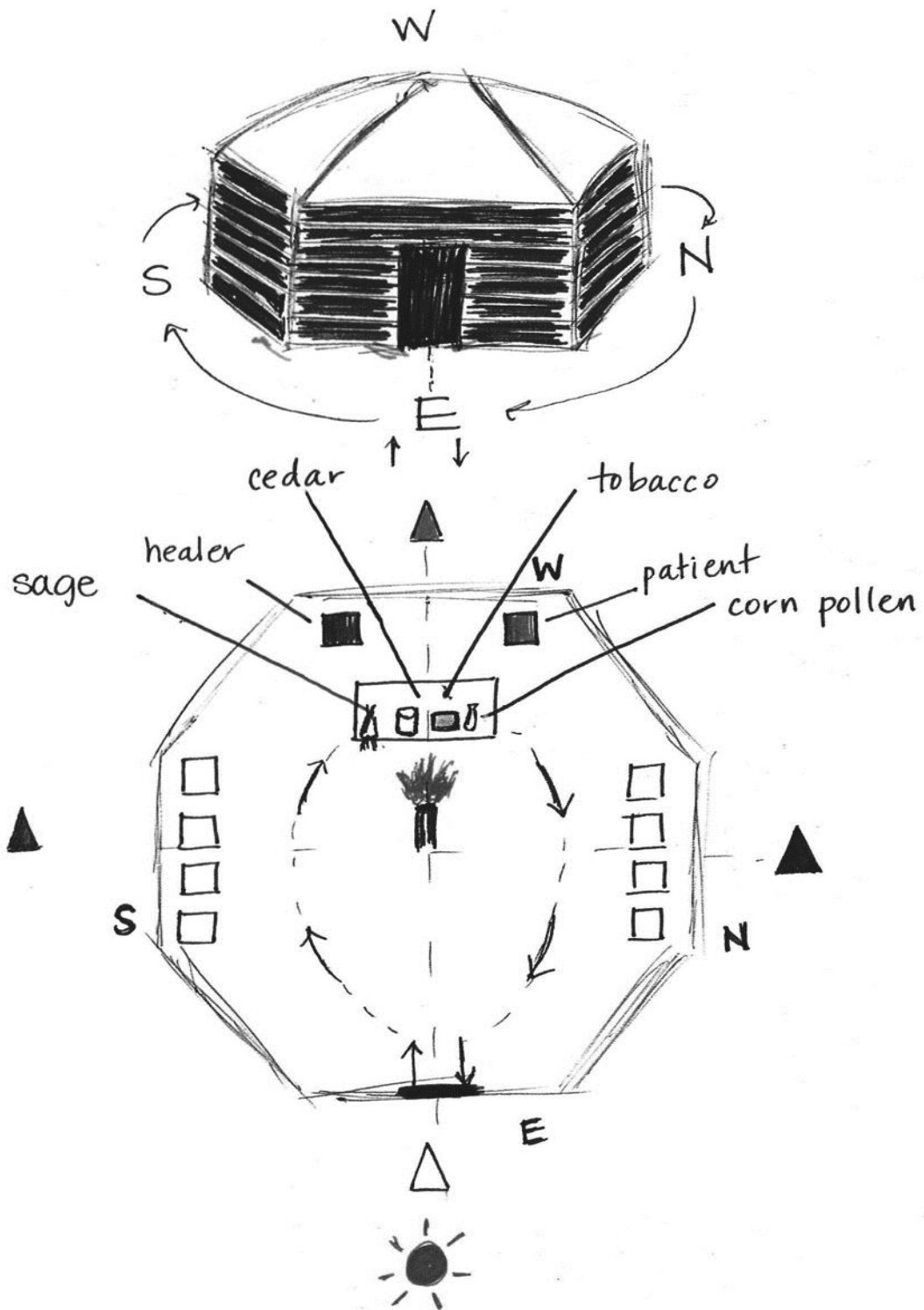


Figure 7. Tsosie-Mahieu, A. (2009). *Hooghan* (hogan).



co-researchers as a measure to ethically manage the direction of our research design—a relationship that subsists beyond our scholarship.

Traditional modalities or “beings” foreground and embody the progression of our dissertation processes. These “beings,” speak a language of *Hózhó*, *K’é* (kinship), and *K’é Náházdlii* (continual renewal), and do not replicate information falsely. They narrate and express life itself, and impart how to live a “good life” and be a “good person.” They offer endless and storied teachings that can only be derived from actualizing the lessons they hold. Albeit, as the creators of each modality, we have come to understand that while they serve as our tools to wayfind we, in turn, function as their tools to carry out their work.

Spiraling outward as the nexus of each modality is *Hózhó*—the catalyst that has redefined our commitment as Indigenous researchers. This personal transition is levied by an uncompromising diligence of our group’s quest to restore a sense of human wellness to the arena of academia, while retaining an “umbilical connection” to who we truly are as Indigenous peoples. As carriers of this bundled knowledge, we have become morally and spiritually bonded: *T’aala’i Diidleel* (we become one). (C. Davidson, J. Diaz, J. Estrada, & J. Singson, personal communication, May 28, 2010).

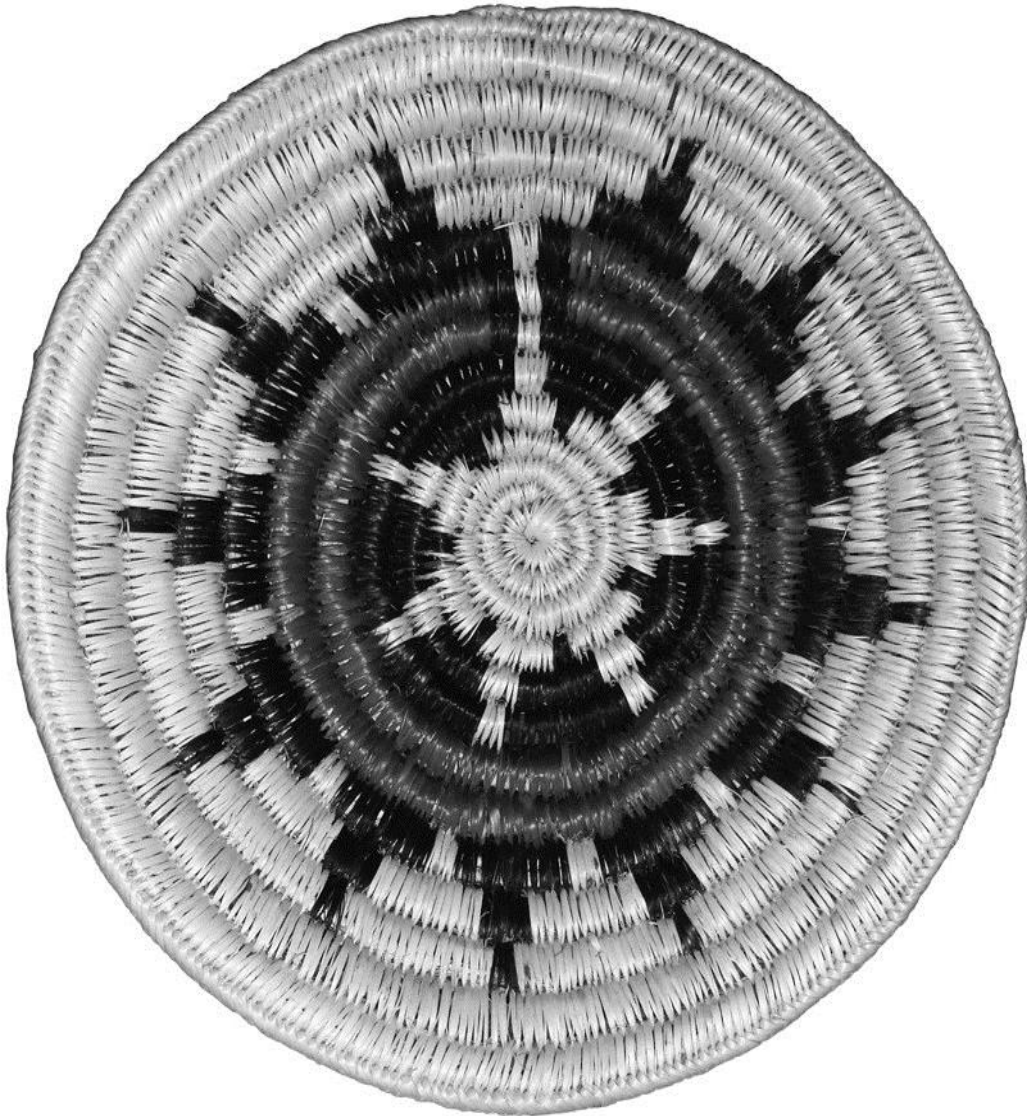
Unseating institutionalized canons, these fundamental truths bridge research assessment with sensitivity toward relational accountability, thereby reshaping Western research standards in accord with “beauty.” Without conscious planning, we rebuilt and strengthened our connections with relations previously annulled from the dissertation process, thereby enacting what Austin (2009) terms as *T’aa altso alk’éi daniidli*. Glossed as a principle of universal kinship where all beings are considered “interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent” (p. 83), *T’aa altso alk’éi daniidli* is a communal discernment of the world and the universe as a partitionless network of positive relationships. Represented in words, the hogan dialogue principles are a paragon of this concept and are an inborn part of Beautyway research criteria that succored the remaking of ourselves as *Bilá ‘ashdla’* (Five-Fingered Ones). In consequence, upon returning to the writing of our dissertation projects, we realized that “when we return[ed] back to the western mind to ground the Indigenous experience, we [found] that the notion of who we are in the western paradigm shift[ed]...we [now] see that we are in the western mind, but not of it” (Hibbard, 2001, p. 38).

**Shádi'ááh (South): Ts'aa'.** The *Ts'aa'* (see Figure 8), like the *Tádídíín Bijish*, *Awéétsáál*, and the *Hoghaan*, is an embodiment of my personal history. Dwelling within the landscape of its design, the symbology of the sumac made basket communicates an interpretation of the Navajo creation story (S. Yazzie, personal communication, July 27, 2010) and is a testimony of foundational teachings necessary in leading an ideal existence. Starting from the central whorl—the umbilical start to one's life journey—to the patterned herringbone finish of the outer rim inspired by the small limbs of the juniper cedar tree (Simpson, 2003),

[t]he circular Diné basket includes twelve elements, six male and six female, and is woven in a clockwise direction with the entrance to the east and the exit the same direction, symbolic of the Diné female Hogan... With its four colors, the basket represents the four natural elements of land, air, fire, and water, as well as a person's entire life cycle, including birth, adolescence, adulthood, and old age...[and] includes the cycle of thinking, planning, implementing, and evaluating (Clark, 2009, p. 235).

Pregnant with many interpretations and ritual uses (Schwarz, 1997), the *Ts'aa'* (commonly referred to as a Navajo wedding basket) is a ceremonial record of the nuptials that occurred between me and my husband at *Kéyah ániidí* (New Lands) in the summer of 2007. This “affinal solidarity” (Witherspoon, 1975) has impressed upon me the need for “right and respectful relations with others” (McCarty as cited by M'Closkey, 2002, p. 21) in an effort to maintain proper order in the world.

The *Ts'aa'* used during our Navajo marriage ceremony was partially filled with blue cornmeal mush prepared by *Shímasání* (my maternal grandmother), Sally Yazzie. Upon my carrying this into the ceremony site, *Shícheít* (my maternal grandfather), Lee Earl, who served as the ceremonial practitioner, oriented the basket to the east, blessed the circumference with yellow corn pollen, and proceeded to sprinkle pinches of pollen on the sacred mush beginning from east to west (male directional course), then south to north (female directional course). As my husband and I consumed fingerfuls of mush—beginning from the east, then the south, west,



*Figure 8.* Davidson, R. (2010). *Ts'aa'* (Diné ceremonial basket).

north, and finally, the center—it was explained to us that this marriage ceremony was the holy way in which we would go forward in our lives together: prosperous, healthy and blessed (L. Earl & D. Tso, personal communication, June 9, 2007). Making this same observation is Navajo elder and educator, Harry Walters, who describes the affinal bond as being safeguarded by “[a]ll the knowledge that lies to the east,...south,...west, [and] north” (Schwarz, 1997, p. 71).

While I privilege feminine agency throughout this dissertation, it is necessary to acknowledge the masculine presence, in all forms, in providing a harmonious counterbalance to female entities. Zolbrod (1984) notes this equipose through male-female relationships among the common pairings of earth and sky, night and day, summer and winter, and the connubial tête-à-tête between *Asdzáá Nádleehé* (Changing Woman) and *Jóhonaa’ éí* (Father Sun):

You are male and I am female. You are of the sky, I am of the earth. You are constant in your brightness, but I must change with the seasons...

Remember, as different as we are, you and I, we are of one spirit. As dissimilar as we are, you and I, we are of equal worth. As unlike as you and I are, there must always be solidarity between the two of us. Unlike each other as you and I are, there can be no harmony in the universe as long as there is no harmony between us (p. 275).

In accordant with my matrimonial union, as modeled by *Asdzáá Nádleehé* and *Jóhonaa’ éí*, upholding social order on the surface of this world is a personal power that is extolled through *Hózhóqji* thinking. A duality of knowledge that is not only present within my own marriage, but is a complementarity aspect that is present within all life forms (Schwarz, 1997).

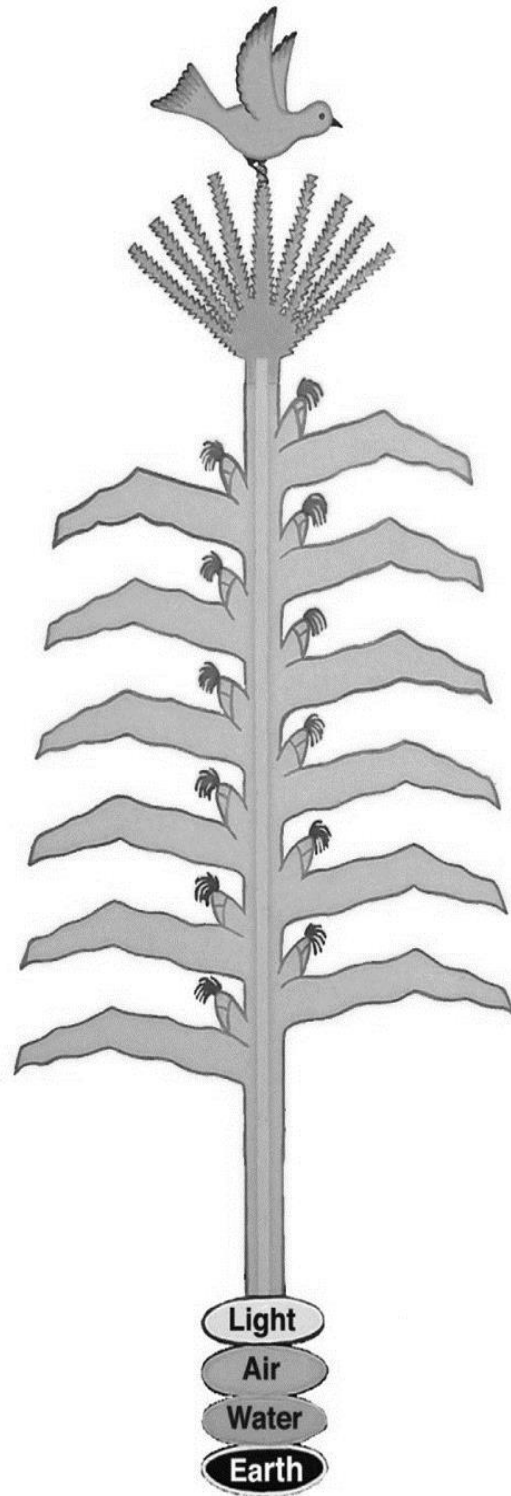
**E’e’aah (West): Tádídíín (Cornpollen).** In theorizing about embodied pedagogical truths, prominent Navajo scholar and weaver Wesley Thomas (1996) juxtaposes the following warning:

In Navajo culture, theories are of marginal interest because they do not have life forces, *be’iina*. An entity of any form has to have *be’iina*. It is imbued with *be’iina* through the process of creation. Theories are considered to “have no life of their own” and therefore, can not make any valuable contribution to the lives lived by traditional Navajo people. To

be beneficial, thinking must be brought to life. It is given life through overlap with empirical concepts that make thoughts absolute and real. They become tangible. Entities of all forms and shapes need *be'iina*. Thoughts and plans become real when coupled with speech, song, prayer, or action (p. 36).

Rather than considering his cautionary statement a limitation in constructing a Beautyway lens, Thomas' counsel, alternatively, imparts a crucial Diné precept in connection to the nature of knowing. In the case of this dissertation, the advent of *Tádídíín* has awakened me to this rule. Understood as the Navajo tree of life (Capelin, 2009), the Corn Stalk Model (see Figure 9) depicts: the four natural elements of earth, water, air and light as sources of subsistence; the leaves signify six male—Protection Way (*Naaghaiji Keh'go*) principles, and six female—Beautyway (*Hozhooji Keh'go*) principles; the tassel of the stalk is where pollen is produced; and the blue bird (*Dolii*) denotes wisdom (Clark, 2009). In addition to being suffused with stories, songs and ceremonies, the corn plant exemplifies fertility and is considered a life source gifted by the *Diyin Dine'é* (Holy People) who, according to Sadie Bluehouse, “told the Navajos in the beginning, corn will be your food, your prayer (Capelin, 2009, p. 12). By this means, corn pollen is used as an offering to the *Diyin Dine'é* in bringing rain, and is a form of protection for oneself, family, home, livestock, land, and anything else that a person desires to shield from an untoward occurrence (Schwarz, 2001).

An omnipresent part of my research pathway, *Tádídíín* has bred what Meyer (2008) terms a “causative agency of intention,” which calls for me “to be more than a woman of my word. To be a woman of my *intention*” (p. 222). This is most fervidly felt by the instruction given to us by *Asdzáá Nádleehé* (also referred to as Changing Woman and who is considered a mother to all), as remembered by River Junction Curly, “You will speak for us with pollen words. You will talk for us with pollen words... I made you, my children, because I dressed you with corn pollen,



*Figure 9.* Clark, F. (2009). Corn stalk model.

because I dressed you with dew” (Wyman, 1970, pp. 620-621). As a part of the sanctity of my creation as a *Náhookáá Dine’é* (Earth Surface People), the content of my cognition, speech and composing text of this dissertation must coalesce around a language of growth, fertility, kinship, reciprocity, regeneration, restoration, and harmony. Accentuating my assertion, Schwarz (1997) informs us that, “air plays a pivotal role in the animation of every contemporary Navajo...The air circulating in, through, and out of the body forms small winds over the entire surface of the body that make moving, talking, and thinking possible” (p. 233). While, here again, Thomas (1996) raises insight concerning the respiring of thought into beinghood. He writes,

In the Navajo world, knowledge is constructed of a combination of thought and speech. Furthermore, voice is constructed with a combination of language and speech. *Nilch’i* (air) is the agent for voice. When voice becomes the medium, the agents are songs and prayers. The latter two—air and voice—in turn, initiate personification in Navajo cosmology (p. 33).

Through the vocal vibration of pre-dawn prayers, humbly uttered from beyond and within the interior of *Diné Bikeyah*—my permanent home—my personal use of a *Tádídíín Bijish* (corn pollen pouch) has aided in the animation of this dissertation. A conception stimulated from an intuitive process involving dreams, song, and prayer, the *Tádídíín Bijish*, for me, has harbored a deliberate move in seeking a framework that does not contravene my tribal reality. This lens shifting (from colonized to decolonized) has unmasked and revealed a critical social consciousness that has revitalized a vision of *Hózhó*, wherein pre-modern truths form the basis of my cultural and political action as a Native female academic.

In the same spirit of “cultural democracy,” remaining on a Pollen Path within the hub of the dominant mainstream requires an edict that Darder (2011) says ought naturally prod individuals to “reflect critically upon [my] world, cultural values and practices, and personal histories so that [I] may better understand [myself] and the social relations of power that affect

[my life] and shape [my] social participation” (p. 74). Hence, to subdue this aspect of my methodology is to desecrate and abandon a way of thinking that has underlied my successful attainment of a doctoral education and, most importantly, my continued existence as a Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish woman. In view of this, the *Tádídíín Bijish* injects this project with pollen thoughts and pollen words, so the anticipated research goal of restoring harmony is assured.

**Awéétsáál (Cradleboard).** Synonymous with the need to sustain and understand an intergenerational dimension of loving predicated on *Hózhó* (A. Darder, C. Davidson, J. Diaz, L. Emerson, J. Estrada, J. McAlpin, J. Singson, A. Tsosie-Mahieu, personal communication, May 26, 2010), the *Awéétsáál* (see Figure 10) is a Navajo paradigm that epitomizes unconditional love in its purest form. A commemorative mark of a child’s entry into this world is a rejoiceful chant that a father sings after a cradleboard has been structurally prepared:

I have made a baby board for you my son  
May you grow up to be a great old age  
Of the sun’s rays have I made the back  
Of black clouds have I made the blanket  
Of rainbow have I made the bow  
Of sunbeams have I made the side loops  
Of lightning have I made the lacings  
Of sun dogs have I made the footboard  
Of dawn have I made the covering  
Of black fog have I made the bed (Leighton, 1947, p. 21).

In consideration of my sons’s welfare, I unhesitatingly chose to swath them with the protective elements of the universe immediately succeeding their births. The literal placement of my children’s newly born bodies, on the foundation that is the rootedness of their existence, is a mammoth statement of how I have determined to initiate the molding of their personhood; for this visibly “signals to the family, extended family, and clan that the infant is being brought up as a Navajo child” (Goodluck, 1998, p. 90). Symbiotically coupled to every project that I elect to be



a part of are maternal strivings that manifest themselves as thought, spoken, and acted deeds executed in the best interest of that which is most precious to me: my children. Witherspoon (1975) observes this encultured behaviorism:

Motherhood in Navajo culture is identified and defined in terms of life, particularly its source, reproduction, and sustenance. Mothers, therefore, give and sustain life for their children. The symbols of motherhood are based on the source, reproduction, and sustenance of life, and these symbols are imbued with powerful meanings in terms of solidarity. Mother and child are bound by the most intense, the most diffuse, and the most enduring solidarity to be found in Navajo culture (p. 15).

Reemphasizing the nature my gendered positionality as a mother, Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran (1995) tap into my maternal motivation to improve the human condition through a human-centered methodology:

The female, through her ability to be pregnant, has gestated the traditional lifeworld in order to ensure its life. Since the female brings into the world the physical life of the people, the expectation has been that she also carries the psychological and spiritual well-being and life of the community (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 38).

An inconspicuous power source within the academy, the maternal spirit “move[s] in ways unimagined by most Western academic impulses” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 136), for it is driven by the principled obligation to engage forthrightly in maternally experiencing the world—an ability that my children have endowed me with and, as such, is the heart of this methodology. To comprehend methodology in this way is to open up a space to “rematriate” (Maracle, 1996) a process in which to think, plan and live, that is commensurate with the hope that I may maintain the fortitude to rear my children, so they may be strong enough to become indigenous ancestors themselves (Allen, 2002).

Grounded in the presence of life experience, these compressive accounts are designs of thinking nested in “ancient agency” (Meyer, 2008). As Diné cultural modalities, they serve as an intervening agency to prevent the pedagogical oppression and epistemological malformation of

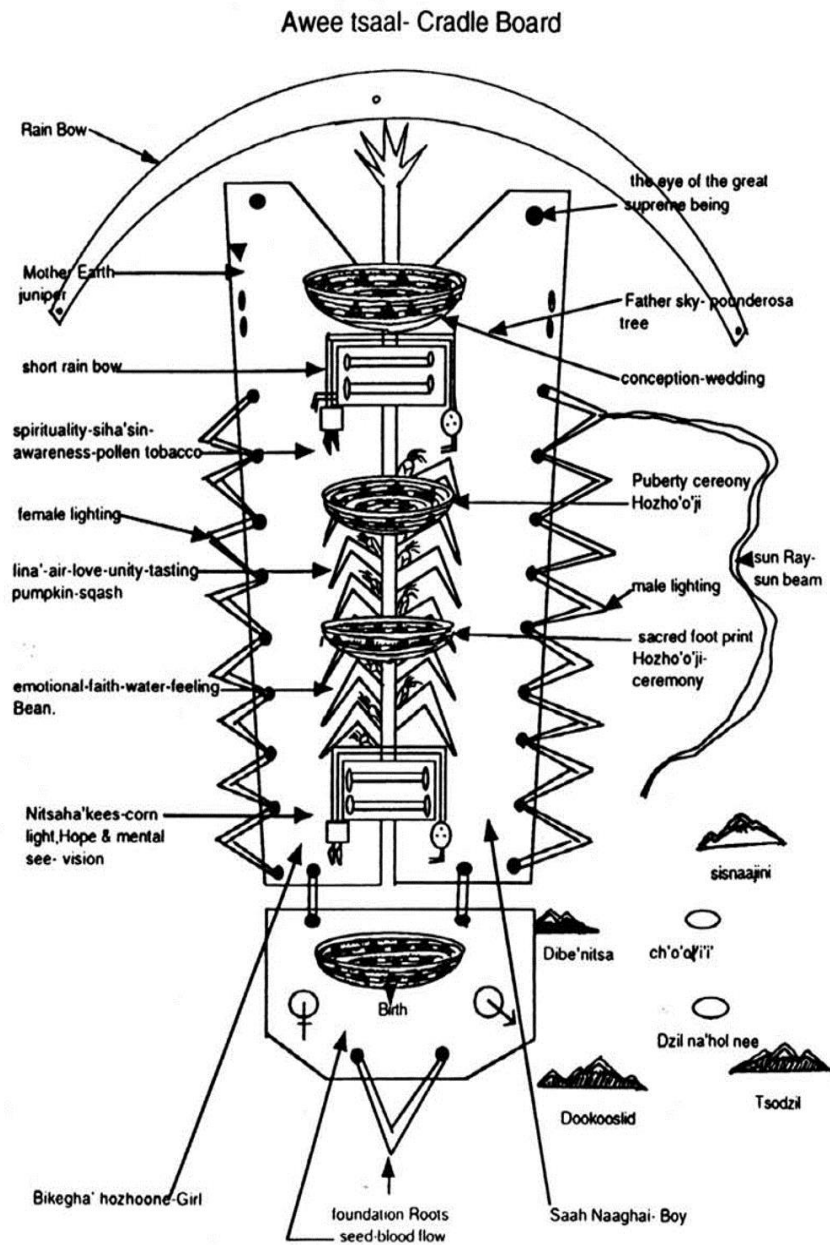


Figure 10. ODCLC (2008). *Awéétsáál* (cradleboard).

ritualized ways to gather, interpret and report data. Furthermore, they encompass cultural proprieties that are to be upheld, even as I have journeyed beyond my spiritual home of *Diné Bideyah*. No longer in the shadow of Westernized standards or methods, “the power of our most important traditional teachings will become evident as they begin to ease our suffering and restore peace” (Alfred, 1999, p. 29).

### **Beautyway Lens**

Navajo weaver Roberta Blackgoat exhorts, “The teachings of those gone before us—those constitute our ceremony” (Benally, 2011, pp. 34-35). In concert with Blackgoat, is the seemingly titled monograph “Research is Ceremony,” written by Opaskwayak Cree scholar, Shawn Wilson (2008), who references his father in the following statement: “knowledge and peoples will cease to be objectified when researchers fulfill their role in the research relationship through their methodology” (p. 74). Bolstering this standpoint, Wilson cites Cora Weber-Pillwax’s use of self-questioning as a benchmark in which the input and output of research information should promise the restoration of relationships through dissertation work:

1. How do my methods help to build respectful relationships between the topic that I am studying and myself as a researcher (on multiple levels)?
2. How do my methods help to build successful relationships between myself and the other research participants?
3. How can I relate respectfully to the other participants involved in this research so that together we can form a stronger relationship with the idea that we all share?
4. What is my role as a researcher in this relationship, and what are my responsibilities?
5. Am I being responsible in fulfilling my role and obligations to the other participants, to the topic and to all of my relations?
6. What am I contributing or giving back to the relationship? Is the sharing, growth, and learning that is taking place reciprocal? (p. 77).

In turn, David Begay and Nancy Maryboy (1998) illumine experiential knowledge as a means to indigenize classical qualitative routes for conducting research, while serving as a measure to circumvent the obfuscation of traditional knowledge:

- [My] research is process-oriented, meaning it is an emerging design primarily concerned with relationship and process (pp. 124-125).
- [I] am the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Results are mediated through [my] knowledge of Diné epistemology (p. 125).
- Ontological assumptions (nature of reality)...Navajo spiritual language and ways of knowing are highly “subjective” in the sense of relating the human experience to the totality of the cosmos. The oneness of all things subjects the human to this holistic relationship (p. 127).
- Epistemological assumptions (relationship or researcher to the researched)—[My] methodology is participative and collaborative. I live within the culture being researched. [My] use of the term “participatory” extends from the general anthropological definition, meaning participating as a researcher in community, to a much broader and fundamental definition of the Diné culture, as one in which the human is an integral participant in the cosmic process (p. 128).
- Axiological assumptions (roles of values)...[I] rely on indigenous ways of knowing, including intuition, spiritual direction, and holistic thinking (p. 128).
- Methodological assumptions (process of research)...Culturally correct research is provided through verification by...Navajo traditional knowledge holders as well as through community-acknowledged principles of indigenous ways of knowing (p. 129).

Given that this project concerns the question of what constitutes a Diné female academic identity and its relationship to a praxis of beauty in research, a Beautyway lens—as narratively mapped through the cultural lifelines: *Tádídíín* (corn pollen), *Hoghaan* (Hogan), *Awéétsáál* (cradleboard), and *Ts’aa’* (ceremonial basket)—will be invoked to prepare a research space that is a reflection of *Hózhóqji* teachings. Revisiting Smith’s (1999) seminal work, she cites that one of the primary steps of decolonization, in the context of higher education, is reinvesting the community with the physical, social, spiritual, and intellectual power to control educational

processes. Punctuating the emancipatory nature of a Beautyway methodology is the manner in which institutional research is given back to its human root:

This research methodology conveys a vision of empowerment by returning to the participants what truly belongs to them, namely, their voice and self-determination. Inherent in this approach is not an attempt to learn about people, but to come to know with them the reality that challenges them. Through this process, research participates in the discovery of those actions that will function to transform institutional conditions that limit and prevent the enactment of a culturally democratic process (Darder, 2011, p. 73).

Thus, in replanting my academic undertaking under the auspices of decolonization, along with her cousins, traditional knowledge, and natural law, healing, recovery, and restoration, may freely sprout.

## Chapter 4

### Matrilineal Narrations of a Diné Weaving Heritage

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the human voice behind the woven rugs that have materially assisted untold generations of my mother's family. At no time in the past, had *Shimásáni* (my maternal grandmother, Sally Yazzie), *Shimáyázhí* (my mother's sister, Lena Yazzie), *Shimá* (my mother, Nora Wilkinson), and *Shideezhi* (my younger sister, Sallie Wilkinson), formally or informally, been collectively asked to share their respective stories as Navajo rug weavers. In assenting to be interviewed, I piloted the first phase of interviews in December 2009 and concluded the second and final round in May 2010. By this means, I have asked my relatives to speak about the influence Navajo rug weaving has had on their identity, personal outlook, and thought process—a request that has gladdened their hearts.

Since this dissertation will remain a record for forthcoming generations, they have requested the use of their given name throughout this study. This, thereby, affords them the opportunity to everlastingly speak to a familial readership who may, at some point in the future, wonder who they were, how they lived, and why we ought to concern ourselves with what they have to say. And so, as I individually sat with these women, I listened with rapt attention to their outspokenness regarding their hardship, and the self-knowledge they have gained through their work—the often unheard and unseen emotional weft of Navajo rug weaving.

The profiles of each woman are as uniquely similar and different as the patterns they hand weave. For example, while each of my relatives continues to lead their lives and make their

home on *Diné Bikeyah*, their rearing, education, and induction into weaving offer a compendium of experiences that echo a quiet pride of a legacy that, according to *Shimásáni*, happily lives on through a sixth generational weaver belonging to our matrilineal line: *Shideezhi*, Sallie.

However, while common themes surface in the reading of their graphical information, it is important to garner how each of my relatives has given meaning to her individual experience as a weaver. Relative to language, all, but my sister, are fluent speakers of *Diné Bizaad*; because this holds true for me, as well, I relied on my mother to serve as a translator during the interview I conducted with my maternal grandmother (who neither speaks, nor reads English), and who, additionally, transcribed the same interview from Navajo to English.

## Weaver Profiles

### *Shimásáni*

While given the Diné name, *Ghai* (interpreted in English as light-skinned) by her parents Sam Blackmountain and Anna (Manygoats) Blackmountain, my maternal grandmother is commonly referred to as Sally Yazzie—an English name given to her by a *Bilagáana*<sup>6</sup> nurse at the Tuba City Indian Health Service hospital, proceeding her birth on November 23, 1931 at Horse Lookout Point atop *Dziljiin* (Black Mesa). In Navajo she introduces herself as being of the *Tó'aheedliinii* (Water Flowing Together clan), born for *Chíshí* (Chiricahua Apache clan). Her maternal grandfather's clan is *Kinlichíinii* (Redhouse) and her paternal grandfather's clan is *Tábaahá* (Edgewater People). She is the mother to Lena Yazzie, Nora (Yazzie) Wilkinson, and Roger Yazzie; grandmother to Charlotte (Wilkinson) Davidson, Norma (Wilkinson) Naito, Sallie Wilkinson, Carlton Yazzie, and Paloma Yazzie; and great grandmother to William Wilkinson and Matthew Davidson; and thusly, is the matriarch of our family.

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<sup>6</sup> Navajo term for Anglo.

Underlining the modest existence that fostered her upbringing, she expressed, “Our lives, you see...was very basic.” Befitting this statement, she comments on the way she was simply attired as a child, “I wore boy’s shoes, because my parents said they last longer than girl’s shoes. My clothing, which was sewn at home, was made from old clothes.” In spite of this, she by no means perceived her class background as lacking, for in “looking back I really didn’t know we were poor.” As she went on to narrate the particulars of how she lived out the routine of everyday life, she observed:

SHIMÁSANÍ: Times have changed, as my memory takes me back to my childhood. My family’s livelihood mainly depended on our livestock [sheep, horses, and cows] and rug weaving. My father would say, “You need to care for the livestock, because we cannot support or do for you when *aał óó whiz tih’* (one’s life ends, while another continues). I will not be around to support, plan, and provide for you.

Using only the bare necessities of life, her family lived in a hogan for shelter, and in addition to ranching, they grew vegetable gardens and raised cornfields. She pointed to several locations throughout the western region of *Diné Bikeyah* as either winter (Black Mesa) or summer (Sand Springs and Earthen Dam of Blue Canyon) residences, where the seasonal habitation of these home-places were ultimately driven by the abundance of firewood and forage for cattle. This manner of living lacked the common amenities of modern living of that time, and was completely dependent on the resourcefulness of the family.

SHIMÁSANÍ: Water was hauled in barrels by wagon or we lugged water in jugs whenever our wagon and horses couldn’t make the journey down a cliff or rock outcroppings [that] form[ed] cliffs. Mainly our source for drinking water came from natural springs. During winter, it got hard to get to these natural springs. Snow or chunks of ice was melted, then boiled, then run through a flour sack material to filter it.

At the age of 4 or 5, *Shimásáni* became an active part of this way of life and, in due course, her mother and aunt, Ethel Blackmountain, gave her a few head of sheep to call her own.



As she grew older, her days became principally occupied with maintaining the family sheep herd, by shepherding them from daybreak to sundown. Just as previous generations of women before her, she was eventually imparted the skills to shear, clean, and card wool, and taught how to spin this into yarn. She mentions favorably:

SHIMÁSANÍ: Our sheep were white, black, brown, and gray in color. We would card grays, whites, blacks mixed to get the kind of gray we needed for the rugs. Aniline dyes became available at the trading posts, which we used for our wool dyes. Before this, there were vegetal dyed yarns. My mother and Aunt knew which type to use.

Resultantly, when she would return home from sheep herding she was tasked, time and again, with carding wool and spinning yarn into late evening. She added that because her mother and aunt were weavers they, too, would spend part of the darkness of night working on their rug weaving. When she reached the adolescent age of 13, she acquired a new skill under her mother and Aunt Ethel's instruction: weaving. The first woven rug she completed was a saddle blanket, which measured roughly thirty by sixty inches, and consisted of a striped design throughout the body of the rug with diamond patterning at each corner. A year later, she was able to set up her own weaving loom, and after a period of time she honed the ability "to weave with even edges and quality workmanship." Equally important to the completion of a "good rug," my grandmother also commented on learning the epistemological motives for the proper handling of weaving tools:

SHIMÁSANÍ: These tools are a mainstay necessary in supplying the hard goods a family may need in life. These tools are neither meant to be used as cooking utensils, nor are they to be wrought in the ill-treatment of others, such as spanking children. If this occurs, your child might suffer emotionally or psychologically and you do not possess the knowledge to repair that damage.

She briefly addressed a part of weaving that remains unknown to her, "My uncle used to tell me there are songs for weaving. Unfortunately, I was never taught any of these songs."

Never having attained a conventional Western education, the sum of these conditions bred healthy feelings of independence and material comfort, as her family continually reminded her that she must learn “the Diné way of life [because it] would be good for me.” She greatly attributes her father and grandfather in being among those that primarily helped facilitate an understanding of this philosophical heritage.

SHIMÁSANÍ: I was told by my elders that as women, we are considered *Diné Asdzááni* (Diné women). We come from Changing Woman and White Shell Woman. White Shell Woman resides in our west sacred mountain. Changing Woman resides in the east sacred mountain. In line with this, my father would tell me about teachings regarding the ideal way of being a Diné woman. He told me that one should not seek out gossip, speak ill-will against anyone, and speak in a degrading and harsh tone toward people. Likewise, *Sa’ahnaagháíí bik’eh hózhóón* should always be included in your prayers to ensure a good journey in life. This is expressed as “I will have longevity on the corn pollen path.” In the company of these daily prayers, there must also be an offering of white or yellow cornmeal. I also recall my father saying to me, “As you grow old, there will come a time when you will marry, have children, and grandchildren, and become a grandmother. At that time, you will be in the prime years of your life. In Diné, this is called *Yaa’ dida’ biih geeshii’ goh’*, meaning, a time in your life when you have reached old age without major illnesses or other misfortunes. It is my hope that you, my daughter, will live a good life of old age.”

*Shimásáni’s* comprehension of these teachings was also deepened through the encouraged use of Diné traditional modalities:

SHIMÁSANÍ: My father further explained that a Diné woman should keep Diné pottery vessels, stirring sticks, a sieve made of brush, a metate, and stones for grinding in her home, as *Hózhóqí* prayers and songs are embodied in them. Likewise, he also used to express that the *Honneshgish* (Firepoker) is our grandfather and you should always keep him in your home, because he will protect you. Weaving implements are just like the *Honneshgish* in that they can be utilized for prayers in asking for protection and used in requesting assistance to provide sustenance for the family. The shielding of family from harm also concerns how to care for a newly born child. A newborn baby should be placed in a cradleboard and positioned with the crown of their head facing grandfather fire for four days. This is done to generate a healthy process of thinking, reasoning, and awareness. In addition, a mixture of corn

pollen and water is given to the newborn for these reasons also. I also recall him saying to me, “Even though the only thing you have is a corn pollen bag, regardless of your limited knowledge or learning of any Diné prayers, chants, or songs, continue to have a good heart and a good nature. Negativity and conflict are things that can create illness and, therefore, are not supportive of a healthy life. These are my teachings to you.” These are the few words I remember my father speaking.

By 1949, at the age of 19, *Shimásání* married Kee Yazzie-Horseherder through a prearranged marriage planned by her father. Their union mirrored the self-sufficient lifestyle of her early years of life, as they established three hogan residences: one at Blue Canyon (their summer home situated down inside the canyon) and two at Black Mesa (serving as their spring and winter residences). Within a span of four years, their household came to include two daughters, Lena and Nora, and one son, Roger (their youngest child). *Shicheii* (my maternal grandfather) acquired employ within various occupations for he was a coal miner, a laborer for the railroad franchises Santa Fe and Union Pacific railroad, a custodian for the Navajo Generating Station, and eventually settled into the carpentry trade; all the while, *Shimásání* continued to supplement their income with rug weaving. Sadly, their 28-year marriage ended with *Shicheii*’s untimely passing at the age of 48 in May of 1977, as a result of a heart attack. Ensuing the cessation of his life over 34 years ago, she continues to weave today, at the elder age of 79.

Over the course of several decades, my grandmother has used weaving as means of securing the necessities of life through an impressive weaving repertoire that includes the skillful re-creation of rug styles that include: The Eyedazzler (a design consisting of an oblique arrangement of serrated diamond shapes, woven with a vivid yarn palette); Storm Pattern (the configuration of the design is associated with the atmospheric conditions of a rainstorm: lightening, thunder, and rainfall); Teec Nos Pos (meaning, “Ring of Cottonwood Trees, is a

design motif so named after its Navajo place-name in the northeastern part of *Diné Bikeyah*); and Two Grey Hills (a geometrical pattern that emerged from the northwest region of *Diné Bikeyah* referred to in Navajo as *Bis dahlitso*). However, the ebb of her artistry has tapered, owing to a change in her health and home environment. Voicing the attenuation of her physical state she says, “I weave smaller rugs now...due to my physical health and well-being, particularly after my [mastectomy] surgery, and ongoing vision problems. I weave, maybe, one every two months.” She also takes into account how the forced estrangement from the spatial province she has, for a lifetime, called home has impinged her weaving: “I pretty much stop[ped] learning new designs and styles when I relocated to my current residence in 1989. It’s been over 22 years, since I’ve moved here, and have woven rugs that are considered difficult.”

The words “moved here” is an allusion to The Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974<sup>7</sup>. Signed into law by President Gerald Rudolph Ford, Jr., this act resulted in the government-enforced expulsion of thousands of Diné people, in addition to 100 Hopi people, from a land base both groups have a deep ancestral association with—among those removed, include *Shimásáni*, *Shimáyázhí* (my mother’s sister), *Shimá* (my mother), and *Shidá’i* (my mother’s brother).

SHIMÁSÁNÍ: The land dispute resulted in our removal and relocation from our homelands where our umbilical cords are buried..[In] 1974, the Relocation Act was mandated by Congress for forced removal of many Navajos, including us.

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<sup>7</sup> On December 22, 1974, U.S. Congress passed Public Law 93-531, The Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act (the “relocation law”). Despite the protests of Navajo and Hopi people, the law mandated the partition of 3,000 square miles of land belonging to the Hopi and Navajo nations (otherwise, referred to as the Joint Use Area), and the removal of more than 15,000 members of the Navajo and Hopi tribe. See Malcolm D. Benally’s “Bitter Water: Diné Oral Histories of the Navajo—Hopi Land Dispute,” for more information.

In publicly remonstrating this enactment, she has protested alongside other Diné men and women in Washington, D.C. in the early 1970's and while there, visited the congressional offices of members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives, in an effort to halt one of the largest relocation efforts in United States history—part of her activist participation is recorded in the 1985 Earthworks Production documentary, *Broken Rainbow*. The rupture between what she recognizes as her refuge and what is, now, considered “home,” continues to impact her current mood on the topic:

SHIMÁSANÍ: I live near Navajo Springs [Arizona] at a place called Rim House Cluster. There are many families that relocated to this area from various regions of what is, now, considered a part of the Hopi Reservation. It's like we live in a foreign land that does not belong to us and we have been removed unwillingly from our Native lands. It's not an ideal location for me, and the land that we relocated from was good. Too many regulations and policies to abide by, due to the fact that several families now have common usage of this small parcel of land for our livestock. It's difficult, at times, for me to live this way. I sometimes wish I could move back to my old homestead back on my own land.

Despite the advent of this and other life changes underwent by my grandmother, she continues to maintain an indefatigable weaver's spirit—one that does not carry a terminal application to life's processes:

SHIMÁSANÍ: Every day I set up my loom and turn my thoughts to the design I want to weave. When I'm done weaving for the day, I rest so I can start early on my rug the following day. At that time, my thoughts, again, turn to my rug—always continuing, and never ending. Everything's like that.

### **Shimáyázhí**

The eldest child of Sally (Blackmountain) and Kee (Horseherder) Yazzie, my Aunt, Lena Yazzie, was born on December 17, 1951 in Tuba City, Arizona. Disconcertingly similar to my grandmother she, too, was given a Western name by a *Bilagáana* nurse at the Tuba City Indian Health Service hospital. She recognizes her “first clan” as *Tó'aheedliinii* (Water Flowing

Together clan), born for *Kinlichíinii* (Redhouse). Her maternal grandfather's clan is *Chíshí* (Mescalero), and her paternal grandfather's clan is *Kíiyaa'áanii* (Towering House). The place she refers to as her childhood home is "about 11 miles south of Red Lake Trading Post" in the tribal communities of Blue Canyon and Black Mesa (of northeastern *Diné Bikeyah*), while she references *Naat'áanii Nééz* (Shiprock), Diné Nation, New Mexico as "the place I have lived since 1989."

With respect to institutional instruction, *Shimáyázhí* attended various United States government boarding schools on the Navajo reservation, where her primary and secondary years of education were received at: Kaibeto Boarding School (kindergarten through second grade); Tuba City Boarding School (third through sixth grade); Upper Kaibeto Boarding School (seventh grade); re-enrollment at Tuba City Boarding School (eighth grade) and Many Farms High School (ninth through twelfth grade). By the spring of 1973, she registered as a student at Haskell Indian Junior College where, after two years, she earned an Associate of Arts degree in Business Administration.

When asked about how she was introduced to the weaving world, she marveled at how this was a principal activity that encircled her life, and that of her kindred:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: I saw my mom [weave] a lot. She was kind of known by traders...and then my grandma Anna and my grandma Ethel...both wove rugs. My mother told me that when they [Anna and Ethel] were young, they wove rugs all the way from when they were just little girls. My mother said they used to weave really big rugs like 10 feet tall or something like that...And when I was growing up it [was] usually the older ladies, like my grandmas' age, that would be weaving[.] So everybody seemed like they were into weaving, because ...they didn't have jobs, they didn't have an education or anything, so that's how they survived. They sold their rugs and that's how they bought groceries and whatever they wanted to pay for.

She goes on to briefly note a change in method associated with this family practice:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: [T]hey also sheared sheep and prepared their own yarn and warp. They also used plants to color their...yarn. That's what they did[.] These days we don't have any more sheep in our family, because our family relocated to different areas [of Arizona and New Mexico]...so we have to go to the store and buy our yarn.

Additionally, *Shimáyázhí* called to mind her mother and maternal grandmothers, Anna and Ethel, sitting at their loom space at the age of 5 by saying, "At first, I wanted to learn to weave at that age, but then I thought...one of these days I will." This general feeling was fulfilled in her early 30's, at what time, a shift in her life vocation precipitated:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: The reason why I started to weave was because...I resigned from my job to take care of my grandma [Anna Blackmountain.]...I think it was from [19]83 to [19]89 that I didn't work. So my mother...she said you should start learning how to weave, and you can have income by weaving... you can get money off of that. So that's when I started thinking about that and that's the reason why I started weaving: financial support for myself. I was staying at home, watching grandma, and weaving and taking care of my grandma at the same time.

By *Shimáyázhí's* account, her first rug was a "simple" Eyedazzler design, because "my mother...told me to start with that"—the Eyedazzler is a rug style where the pattern appears as if "the colors are moving around." My aunt reflected further on being an incipient weaver:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: [My mother] showed me how to start it, and she showed me how to put the yarn through and all that. And then, when I would get stuck like on another pattern...I would ask her, "Could you show me how to start this pattern?" and she would show me. And then, it just starts from there. And then, pretty soon you get the hang of it. It just keeps going on its own. When you're weaving, you have to think. It's just like your writing, like what you're doing right here. It's probably the same thing. How you're approaching how to write out whatever you're doing, it's the same way. There's a lot of thinking that goes into it.

With regard to thought process, she imparts, "To me, if you're going to [weave] a rug, you have to have our mind clear." She additionally remarked:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: Your mother is like that. She understood this when she first started weaving. I can see that from when she wove her first rug, and the next one, and the next one, I could see her pattern growing better and better,

and better. As you go along, you learn more about a different pattern, then you try a different pattern again, then you learn that again. This is what having a certain mental attitude can do.

I asked if she has ever preplanned her designs, and she simply replied, “I [have] never drawn a pattern. It’s all in my head.” However, in this vein, she resolutely stands positioned on appraising the preciousness of all rugs.

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: To me, all rugs are good. There’s no such thing as a bad rug. They’re all good rugs to me, you know? If a person is just learning how to weave, there will be some mistakes, but that person really tried their best, so I always see every rug as a good rug.

Over the course of several years, my aunt found herself wanting to further her existential understanding of weaving. In her desire to “want to find the story behind it,” she planned to consult with elders in her family “because they...have really good stories [that] are not written in books.” Instead, this remained an unfilled ambition. She laments,

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: Well, I tried to you know find out the stories behind weaving. I wanted to learn some more about weaving, and the stories the elderly know and how they interpret weaving and...just about that time I wanted to find out where the weaving started and where it began...my grandpa [Rufus Walters] passed away. He was the only one that I was going to ask...I was depending on him for information, but he passed away. So, I didn’t know who else to ask. The only thing I heard was...the weaving part started out with Spider Woman...I don’t know the whole story with Spider Woman...I know some people will probably know, but I never researched it or anything like that. I want to learn more about it, but to this day, I haven’t heard anything.

After momentarily sitting in quiet contemplation, she juxtaposed this undiscovered knowledge with another story she was not fully acquainted with and made mention of Changing Woman by dolefully saying, “All I know is that Changing Woman is who we come from. Nowadays, I think I really should have listened to my grandpa [Rofus Walters] when he was telling us these types of stories.”



Accruing numerous years of weaving experience, my aunt permanently retired from rug making by the year 2000, “because my wrist was bothering me.” Diagnosed with carpal tunnel, she underwent surgery and proceeding her recovery period attempted to resume her time at the weaving loom. However, the intensity of discomfort she was suffering thwarted her effort to weave at the same degree of physical ease she was accustomed to. *Shimáyázhí* expressed with a grimace, “My wrist [would] start to swell up, so I just couldn’t do it anymore. I just stopped, because of the pain...and I’m just working now.” A food service worker at Nenahnezad Community School—a public elementary school located in Fruitland, New Mexico—for over 10 years, she expressed an earnestness to return to rug weaving, “I would still be weaving. I would be. I want to[,] but it’s just the pain[.]...I can’t stand that pain when it starts. When I [work] with the batten, [my wrist] just swells up and starts hurting.”

Thenceforward, her facial expression had redrawn itself to reflect the optimism she carries in keeping our weaving heritage existent in our family; particularly in the face of today’s seeming departure from the transmission of Navajo traditions:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: In some cases, I think our grandmothers had teachings a bit different from nowadays. It’s like we’re more into modern things, modern ways, because there are more educated people, more educated women. They have to live like the white man’s way and the Navajo way. Both. They have to like combine it or something. I don’t know what you call that. These days, it also seems like a lot of Navajo girls don’t have *Kinaaldá* ceremonies done for them. The way my grandma used to talk was if you had that ceremony then you’re more likely to overcome a lot of things. But it doesn’t make you less of a Navajo woman if you don’t have it. You’re supposed to have two ceremonies, but I only had one, because I was in school. [However,] I don’t feel like I’m less Navajo than other women who have had both. These days, a lot of young ladies don’t have it, yet they still succeed in life. Like you and your sisters. Even though you girls didn’t have this done, remember you are *still* Navajo, because you come from your mother, who *is* Navajo. As for weaving, this has been passed on from generation to generation [in our family]...Now, it’s going toward your generation, and see, Sallie, is already starting to weave. It’s being passed on and it’s good that it’s

like that. And I hope that it'll be passed on like that to your children [and] your grandchildren. I hope that you learn how to weave, too, so you see what your sister Sallie is doing. You can learn this, too, and *then* you'll find out your own answers to these questions that you are asking me (smiling).

### *Shimá*

In her first language, my mother introduced herself with lingual ease, “Ya’atée’h, shi éi Nora Wilkinson yinishyé. Tó’aheedliinii éi nishł Kinlichii’nii éi báshishchíín, aádóó Tábaahí éi da shichei, Kiiyaa’ánii éi da shináí.” With blithe spirit, she laughingly shared that on August 21, 1953 she was born during “the last day of an *Ndáá’* ceremony,” in the rural community of Rare Metals in northwestern *Diné Bikeyah*. In lieu of what was an extemporaneous delivery, my mother and grandmother were transported by car to the maternity ward of Tuba City Indian Health Service hospital—at this point, it is unsurprising to announce that the English designation, Nora, was given by a party other than her birth parents. Like her older sister Lena, *Shimá* also recognizes Blue Canyon as her original home. “Through the relocation program,” she chose to resettle in the southeastern part of *Diné Bikeyah*, often referred to as the “New Lands” area of Sanders, Arizona, or *Nahata Džill* (interpreted in Navajo as “planning with strength”). With regard to geographic proximity to family, she lives approximately 20 miles northeast of *Shimásáni’s* chosen homesite, and approximately 120 miles south of *Shimáyázhí’s* residence.

The systematic instruction my mother received was sequentially identical to my aunt Lena, following her admittance to Haskell Indian Junior College in the fall of 1972. In the course of completing her course requirements for an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Arts, she met my father, Wilbur Dale Wilkinson in the fall of 1973. Succeeding their marriage in July of 1974 at Washburn, North Dakota, she graduated from Haskell in the spring of 1975. Over a nine year period, their household came to include three daughters: Charlotte (Wilkinson-Davidson), Norma

(Wilkinson-Naito), and Sallie (Wilkinson). Eventually, their 13 year marriage ended in divorce in 1987, and subscribed *Shimá* to seek regular employment off the Navajo reservation to support me and my sisters. For a time, she was employed as a home hospice worker for terminally ill patients in Flagstaff, Arizona, and later enrolled at Mountain State Institute of Technology in Phoenix, Arizona. While there, she earned certificates in bookkeeping, accounting and other aspects of business administration. Nonetheless, she eventually returned to the reservation in 1990 and began to weave full-time.

Digressing from the above retrospective introduction, she called to mind the “humble,” “basic,” and “disciplined” tempo that was lived out through her formative years of childhood:

SHIMÁ: Nine months out of the year, we [my older sister, myself, and my younger brother] were in boarding school, and we only had three months for summer break[.] During this season, my parents [and] my grandparents would take a break from the ranching, and we took over...and it was the same way with the holiday breaks[.]

She also recounted completing “everyday chores” that had “nothing to do with modern machinery,” but were endless tasks that were “done with your two hands.” “I helped my mother and grandmothers shear, card, clean and dye the wool. As far as weaving the rugs on my own, I didn’t get to do that again until way later on.” For my mother, this brought up the memory of how these hand-woven rugs supplied a comfortable means of subsistence, for they were often traded for “wagons, harnesses, saddles, concho belts, squash blossom necklaces, wood stoves, sewing machines, Pendleton blankets, kerosene for lamps, groceries and many other goods.”

Over time, *Shimá* found herself being invited to participate within a feminine arena reserved for the comparatively older matrilineal members of the family:

SHIMÁ: Back in my childhood, I mainly lived with my grandmother, Ethel Blackmountain, and when she had her loom set up I would, now and then, do pieces of it. At first, I would make a lot of mistakes, so my grandmother would take them back out and redo them. Later, it got

easier and clearer about what she was doing; that's how my interest in rugs started.

At the age of 13, this process of knowledge transfer engendered a favorable outcome: the completion of her first woven rug, a saddle blanket—"the only time I wove a rug like that."

When prompted to explain why she opted to weave a saddle blanket, she reasoned, "Back then, my grandmother Ethel was weaving that particular rug [style] and I wanted to weave a rug that was similar to hers."

When asked if other family members have, since, contributed to the enrichment of her weaving workmanship, she added:

SHIMÁ: I would say my grandmother Ethel, my grandmother Anna, my mother Sally, and my sister Lena. My grandma Anna, when I would go to her house, she was always involved with different processes of weaving. She would either be carding wool, spinning wool, dyeing it, cleaning it, shearing it from sheep...spinning it or at her loom weaving...[S]he would always have a rug set up...and I would be right there, and I would help her with all those things. My mother, would tell me [about] the different ways of weaving, the different designs that she was weaving, [and] because she wove a greater variety of designs than my grandmothers did, she would...tell me different ways of making a specific design...[T]hose parts [of weaving], I mainly learned from her.

She was also apprised of how to care for her loom by her mother who warned, "a child must not run through it. I didn't ask your grandmother why or anything, but no one is supposed to going through there." Pertaining to the final handling of weaving tools, "I was told that when they're worn out, you don't throw them in your trash can. You take them out in nature, put them back, and say, "Thank you for all your help."

In speaking to the distinctiveness of the rugs she currently weaves, she voiced:

SHIMÁ: The designs I weave, mostly, are of the Teec Nos Pos pattern in the raised outline<sup>8</sup> style. [This style] originated from the Teec Nos Pos area and there might be over...200 [variations]. [T]he reason why it is called Teec Nos Pos is the border [symbolizes a] “circle of cottonwood trees.” [M]y mother [says] there are certain styles that look like they’re creatures from the water, because they have webbed feet. [This] symbolizes...where we also originated from...from “the water that flows together” area, which is around the Four Corners region.

According to *Shimá*, her natural gravitation toward the Teec Nos Pos pattern was furthered by what she observed her relatives weave.

SHIMÁ: I did not really choose that [style.]...[M]y mother [and] my sister were weaving that [design], so that’s just what I learned[.] I just watch[ed] them weave and later I attempted to do it. [T]hat’s how I come upon weaving the [Teec Nos Pos raised outline].

Her weakening visual faculty also lends to why she favors the raised outline, because “the patterns [are] easier to see.” Whereas, “the traditional weave, you have to be up close to [the loom to] clearly see where each design row should begin.” In view of this, she remarked, “I weave as much as I can. [S]ometimes I weave four rugs in one month and sometimes only two.”

With gratitude, she has recognized how she has “really grown a lot,” since deciding to weave on a full-time basis. Quick to amend the assumption that she has mastered the techniques of weaving, she states, “Weaving teaches you a lot and I feel like I’m still learning. [I]t seems like I only know the basics right now.” She broadened this sentiment by revealing,

SHIMÁ: I would say as far as patience goes, where I used to not have very much of it, now I do. I [have] noticed that about myself. I don’t just rush to judgment [anymore]. I take things in a much calm[er] manner. Also, I would say [weaving] is almost therapeutic, because sometimes when you’re stressed out weaving makes your thinking more clear. If you are thinking about how to resolve a problem usually, for me, a solution comes to mind.

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<sup>8</sup> Raised outline is a method of weaving where weft threads outline the patterns woven into the rug, thereby lending a three-dimensional effect to the rug.

Presently, her efforts are affectionately focused on teaching my younger sister, Sallie, this traditional craft. “Learning to be positive” and “patient” has, therefore tendered a good-natured tolerance for my sister’s restlessly eager comportment:

SHIMÁ: Right now, I’m teaching my daughter to weave. [A]lthough I am teaching her...I can see some stuff that I’ve gone through, because she is often impatient. She want[s] to do something now, right away, she wants to learn “this,” and she wants to learn a certain design. You know, I don’t just tell her, “Oh no, you can’t be doing [that].” I just let her go ahead [and] test it out for herself. She’ll know that I am right (laughing), and that she should take it more slowly, and learn “this” first and then go to the next level and that’s what’s going on with my daughter.

Further, too, is the strong emotive sense my mother feels toward the familial weavers, belonging to a different time, and how they may have been affected by this process:

SHIMÁ: In my family there wasn’t a day that went by without a weaving loom set up by my grandmother, great aunt, and my mother. This was all part of everyday life for me and, therefore, I could not resist from being a part of this daily occurrence of weaving. [M]any times I [have] sat before my loom [and] thought of how my grandmothers might have felt...What were they thinking when they were sitting at their looms? How were their thoughts back then? I sit there and think about those things. In a lot of ways I [think they] would be happy. I would be, because weaving brings a lot of enjoyment. Sometimes I [think], “Grandmothers, wherever you all are, this granddaughter is doing this weaving.” I’m sure it [makes] them glad. It [makes] them happy. Not only my grandmothers, [but] my father, [too]...Now, I’m living that life that they lived...I hope that my grandchildren will someday be able to think about those things, too when they hear it, when they see it, or read it that they take up [weaving] and think, “I can do what my grandmother has done. I can do what she did. I can continue this lifestyle or this way of life.”

*Shimá*, in equal seriousness, impresses upon her family the responsibility to see that this legacy does not languish:

SHIMÁ: For my current and future grandchildren, I really hope [and] wish that they would...even just for their own...I mean not to become an artist or somebody famous, but just do this work, even [if it is] for themselves. I hope that that’s what they do someday: that they take it up on themselves to do that. Right now, I have two grandchildren that are

boys, and if there's a girl, I really do hope she [learns to] weave. If not, I'll settle even for just one of the boys [to learn how to] weave. [H]e can, [then], teach that to his daughter.

It follows from *Shimá's* comments that she has adopted a growing realization that she is a “part of something that my family has been involved in many generations back.” Her continued attention to this reflection reminded her from whom these traditional teachings originated from. Hence, in a pleasantly subdued manner, she remarked,

SHIMÁ: [I]t all goes back to Changing Woman, the First Woman, and the Holy People. The way the stories are told, Changing Woman is our ancestor and she influences how we ought to live our lives. These stories contain teachings for everyday living. For example, getting up early before the sun rises, running to the East, offering up your prayer in the morning. These stories also speak to how a person or we, as women, should conduct ourselves. We need to be knowledgeable about our traditions and be mindful of those teachings, including how to healthily raise a family. These teachings have not changed. If they did, the change is slight.

### *Shideezhí*

Preferring to introduce herself in *Diné Bizaad* (Navajo language), my younger sister wished to open the interview by saying, “Yá’át’ééh, shi éí Sallie LaNova Wilkinson yinishyé. Tó’aheedliinii éí nishłı́ dóó Waterbuster Clan báshíshchíín. Áádóó Kinlichíí’nii éí da shichei dóó Flint Knife Clan éí da shinálí.” Born in Sisseton, South Dakota on June 20, 1984, Sallie (so named after our maternal grandmother), is the youngest daughter of Nora (Yazzie) Wilkinson and Wilbur Dale Wilkinson. “Primarily raised” in Sanders, Arizona, she attended the local elementary and middle schools. Whereas, her public secondary education commenced at St. John’s High School—a high school over 50 miles south of Sanders, where other students from the area were bussed to and from each day—and concluded at Shiprock High School in *Naat’áanii Nééz* (Shiprock), Diné Nation, New Mexico where she graduated in May of 2002. By

the fall of 2005, she enrolled at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, where she later graduated magna cum laude, in December of 2009, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in American Indian Studies. Thereafter, she opted to suspend her original plan of applying to graduate school, and unhesitatingly elected to “move back...to Sanders [Arizona] and start weaving again.”

As a child “growing up around family,” “hearing the language,” and “going to ceremonies,” home life seemed to offer an uncompounded simplicity of “how we know what we know.” An understanding her schooling seemed unable to fully offer. “[W]e learn[ed] things about our culture in school, but at home, I felt like I learned more about this.” *Shideezhí* elaborates, “[B]efore my mom, or *our* mom, had her home [built] in Sanders...we lived with grandma. I remember how we used to help grandma... nurture the sheep [and] feed the hay to the cows and horses.” Entwined with this mode of life was an unrelenting existence of the re-creation of woolen textiles: “I remember what always caught my interest as a little girl was rug weaving. I remember seeing all three of them [*Shimásáni*, *Shimáyázhí*, and *Shimá*] weave and I just thought it was pretty neat.”

When asked to comment on how the skill of weaving materialized for her, she clearly remembered as a 19 year old woman:

SHIDEEZHÍ: I wanted to start out when I was real little...like in fourth or fifth grade. I kind of *pushed* mom into [teaching me] to weave. I remember it was [either] in December of 2003 or January of 2004. I said to mom...“I want to get some yarn and some wool, because I want to start making my own rug.” [M]om was like, “Oh, okay.” So, that’s when she helped me pick out the warp and the yarn and she [said], “[Y]ou can use your auntie’s [tools], since Lena is not weaving as much as she used to.”

To elicit an understanding of the worded connotation “push,” she particularized, “At the time, mom was busy, and no one really said anything to me [about weaving.]” With a steady



intent look, she propositioned, “Maybe mom was waiting for me to initiate the asking. You know, so she [wouldn’t] feel like *she* did it...[or that] she *made* me do it. You know? [Maybe] she was waiting for me to [become] ready.”

After an unspecified period of time, our mother helped her “fix the loom,” “pick out the yarn,” and with the weaving tools our aunt, Lena, gifted her in hand, *Shideezhí* embarked on weaving her first rug. According to *Shideezhí*, this first attempt proved to be a humbling experience in acknowledging her shortcomings as a beginning weaver; an encounter she is forthright about. “I [was] being told by mom, “No, don’t do it like this,” and “be sure you do [the warp] like this. Don’t make it too loose. Don’t make it too tight.”” Her frustration in trying to “make it just right” caused her to “[not] listen to mom when she told me to take [my] time.” This in turn, resulted in the errant construction of a “corseted looking rug.” Reflecting back with a smile, she correlated this experience with how she, originally, underestimated the intricacies of this type of work:

SHIDEEZHÍ: I would look at a rug and [think], “Oh, that looks so easy,” (laughing). You know, that kind of thing I [did] when I was younger. But, when you weave it, you’re like “Oh!” And then you look at that person’s rug, you’re like, “Dang! That person actually wove that with that type of yarn?” My understanding of a lot of things grew from there.

This observation allowed Sallie to reassess the manner in which she conducted herself, “There was a reason why mom was saying that to me.” She, then, shook her head and continued, “I don’t know why I was in a hurry!”(laughing). In admitting this truthfulness, she described this lesson in the following way:

SHIDEEZHÍ: A person finds out quick if they’re dedicated to weaving or not. They’ll find it in their own way, but if they are dedicated to it there is a vast amount of information that you [can] learn. I [have] learned to take my time and watch my edges, and not think about things that aren’t really necessary to think about while you’re weaving.

Ultimately, “one day” in January of 2004, she pleasingly finished her first evenly-edged rug. Prompted to describe this experience she verbalized, “It was exciting! It was a Wide Ruins design. The size was real small. I think it was 2 ½ feet wide and 3 feet high.”

Over the next four months, she continued to be a self-employed weaver, but resigned from this, while she attended Haskell Indian Nations University from August 2005 through December 2009. After her return from university life, Sallie currently weaves “up to eight hours a day.” She delighted in that she has “improved at my weaving” and, now, “chooses my own colors and designs.” She continued to respond positively by saying, “Whenever I’m weaving I always feel happy. I also feel way more confident in myself...more assured.” The styles she weaves range from a “Chief’s Blanket,” The Eyedazzler, Two Grey Hills, and Wide Ruins design—a style she was weaving at the time of this interview. In this respect, I inquired about the source from which she draws her inspiration. In deferring to the landscape, she answered, “I will usually walk around [outside] and see a shape or a color, and this helps me get an idea about how a pattern should come out.” She follows with, “I don’t necessarily look for these things. Certain forms and shades just catch my eye.” She then pointed to the rug on her loom and related, “like these dark green trapezoid and triangle shaped patterns. I think of the color I used to create these as my trees.”

She went on to emphasize how weaving, as a personal expression, has carried the power to permanently govern her way of thinking. “I don’t come to the rug or anything that I am working on in an angry way.”

SHIDEEZHÍ: Because that leaves room for all these negative forces to come in and corrupt our teachings where, you know, a lot of our values and understanding of the world can get lost. And we, ourselves, end up becoming lost and have a hard time finding our way back.

This discernment has, additionally, figured outside the physical limits of her loom space:

SHIDEEZHÍ: I have also carried this same thinking [during] my time as a student at Haskell. When I'm out there in the world, I'm not only representing myself, I am also representing my family. Even though I didn't have a loom with me or a place where I could weave, I still kept the same concepts that would go into weaving into my school work. When I weave, I always want to do the best job that I can. I want to present my work in a good way. So, I used this same approach when I went to college. I would do the best job that I could in my writing. I strove to explain myself or express myself in the same way that I do when I express myself in my rugs. By behaving in this way, I have continued my Diné beliefs in college. And I'll be honest. I really don't know a whole lot of stories, like exactly how Changing Woman taught us our values, but from my perception it's about walking in beauty, meaning you're respectful and considerate toward just about everything in this world, and I try not to stray away from that. I may not know everything about my culture, but I know where I come from.

For *Shideezhí*, the culmination of these accounts has suggested a “truer understanding” of how weaving has “shaped me.” With candor she states,

SHIDEEZHÍ: I, now, know my rugs are never going to be fully perfect. As a [weaver], I'm always going to know where all the flaws are, and that's okay with me. [B]ecause in life, nothing is ever perfect, and I am okay with that. If I wasn't okay with that then I think I would always struggle. You'll always have to alter something. You think you have everything planned out but, something will happen that totally alters your plan. So, *you* have to alter yourself to fit the *new* plan.

In characterizing the overriding emotion she has reaped, since her earliest attempt at the loom, she enthusiastically communicated, “I love weaving!” The enjoyment of how “my personality is reflected in my weaving” is exemplified through the vending of her rug:

SHIDEEZHÍ: I love picking out different colored yarn. When I do this, I get real excited! I think, “I want to use this one, this one, and this one!” [I]n a way, I get to be myself by choosing the colors I want in my rug. When somebody sees your rug it's like, “You know *she* wove it.” For example, I sold [a rug] to this trader, Bob French, and I remember after he looked at my rug he [said], “Wow! This is definitely you. It is very vibrant” (laughing).

For Sallie, a self-perceived significance of weaving has been within the context of being a descendant of this Diné art form. “I do not only weave for myself, but my ancestors.” She

advances this conviction by declaring how this continued engagement has given light to “the family history behind it”:

SHIDEEZHÍ: When I weave, I think about our great grandmas and great, great grandmothers before that...all the women [and] even the men [who] wove before me. I think about them [and] even though I don’t know who they are or who they were, I feel like I get to know them through my weaving.

## **Summary**

Endemic to Navajo philosophy, Navajo rug weaving presents itself as a non-mechanized journey of tactile sensibility that entails a sequence of meditative methods tempered by patience, precision and full attention (Bennett & Bighorse, 1997). From carding, dyeing and spinning the wool, to warping and mounting the loom, positioning shed rods, and using weaving implements, these interwoven moments usher the weaver toward the completion of a rug. In the same way my family blends woolen filaments to give patterned form to their cotton warps, their firsthand accounts collectively texturize the past, present, and future as intelligent interwoven strands of consciousness. With respect to these common threads, the overarching themes that arose from these interviews will be discussed in the resulting chapter, which offer invaluable insight to the principal questions proffered in this study.

## Chapter 5

### Niha'hané: An Intergenerational Reweaving of Hózhó

*Storytelling is like weaving a rug or singing a song. You have to take care of it and use it in the right way, and it will take care of you—Ferlin Clark, In becoming SA'AH NAAGHAI BIK'EH HOZHON: The historical challenges and triumphs of DINÉ college*

#### Introduction

I have a strong memory of watching *Shimásání*, *Shimá*, and *Shimáyázhí* busily caring for their sheep herd among the steep-sided mesas of Blue Canyon—their hogan residence during the summer season. I was probably four years old when I first witnessed the communal affair of processing raw fleece into weaving yarn. I clearly recall being beguiled by the way my relatives' skilled hands shorn, washed, carded, and hand-spun the wool into fine threaded strands. As I grew older, I would often help roll a colorful palette of store bought yarn into large woolen balls, as these same women worked with clever hands to assemble their upright steel-piped looms. Throughout the life of the rug, I would—and still do—revel in the rhythmic sound of the wooden comb blending the dyed weft with the taught horizontal warp. This same warm admiration and wonder has recently been extended toward *Shideezhí* as she, too, has become part of this intergenerational weavership alliance. For a large part of my life, I was unaware of what *really* occurred before me and how this tangibly interplayed with who I am as a Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa and Sahnish woman. This moment represents, precisely, the same feeling that *Shideezhí*, Sallie, experienced as she initiated the inquiry process of “making my own rug.” She imparted, “Maybe mom was waiting for me to initiate the asking. You know? So, she [wouldn't] feel like *she* did it...[or that] she *made* me do it. You know? [Maybe] she was waiting for me to [become] ready.”

Now awakened to the process, I have come to recognize this as the touchstone of my research and my identity as a mother and a Native female academic.

Throughout the interview process, this circle of women consciously attached their answers to relational framings and subjective complexities that live within the situated activity of weaving. The internalization of their cultural realities were unquestionably clear as their spoken responses disclosed shared meanings of an epistemological innerness that, in *Shideezhi's* words, beget “how we know what we know.” Defining an ontological impetus for chronicling family stories, LeManuel Bitsoi (2007) writes, “In the Navajo language, *hane'* means story. *Niha'hané* means our collective stories[.]...As a Navajo I consider *niha'hané* to be living stories[.]” He adds,

Oral history is passed on through storytelling, and is central and integral to the learning process for us. Storytelling is also a way to continue our distinct traditional ways of thinking and living...My mother often reminds me that elders demonstrate how life is to be lived, and that the young should learn through observation (p. 30).

Thusly, this cultural work has reassigned my identity as an academic, from standing outside the margins of my family's narrative accounts to being placed within it; a decolonizing construct that is indigenously visceral, and a socio-political locative Chung (2009) critiques in her own writing, “[D]eparting from more traditional modes of autoethnography, I believe that...the “researcher” [is] always present whether he/she is explicitly named. Thus, in writing the stories of the “researched,” I also write and “(re)encounter mine” (p. 152). In consequence, the cooperative rooting up of our life world began.

In substantiating these woven subjectivities into a Diné maternal praxis, I will interpret the patterns of thinking that surfaced in the narratives by addressing the overarching discourses, each of which have been thematically compartmentalized in the following way: (a) Social-material Relations, (b) Five-fingered Consciousness, (c) It All Goes Back to Changing Woman, and (d) Uterine Politic of Hózhó as a Maternal Diné Praxis. I fully recognize these notions of

truth as being connected, despite the categorical organization of their content in the following sections.

### **Social-material Relations**

The initial question of “Who are you?” resulted in each of my relatives to forefront their individual responses by first, introducing themselves in Diné and by identifying their clan affiliations. Each recognized their maternal or “first clan” (*Shimáyázhí*) as *To’aheedliinii* (Water Flowing Together clan), and singly informed me of the other three clans to which they belong to:

<i>Shimásáni</i>	Father’s Clan: <i>Chísí</i> (Chiriahua Apache clan) Maternal Grandfather’s Clan: <i>Kinlichíinii</i> (Redhouse clan) Paternal Grandfather’s Clan: <i>Tábaahá</i> (Edgewater People clan)
<i>Shimáyázhí</i>	Father’s Clan: <i>Kinlichíinii</i> (Redhouse clan) Maternal Grandfather’s Clan: <i>Tábaahá</i> (Edgewater People clan) Paternal Grandfather’s Clan: <i>Kiiyaa’áanii</i> (Towering House clan)
<i>Shimá</i>	Father’s Clan: <i>Kinlichíinii</i> (Redhouse clan) Maternal Grandfather’s Clan: <i>Tábaahá</i> (Edgewater People clan) Paternal Grandfather’s Clan: <i>Kiiyaa’áanii</i> (Towering House clan)
<i>Shideezhí</i>	Father’s Clan: Waterbuster Clan Maternal Grandfather’s Clan: <i>Kinlichíinii</i> (Redhouse clan) Paternal Grandfather’s Clan: Flint Knife Clan

While no one explicitly labeled this action as the practice of *k’é* (kinship), this is integrally a part of the Diné clan system, as this recognition dictates how we perceive unity built upon our connection with non-blood relations. The four clans used to recognize ourselves are simultaneously built upon the bifurcation and unification, of the matrilineal and patrilineal heritages, which are relationships that perpetuate cooperation and amity that work to improve and stabilize social well-being. In view of this, the traditional introduction of ourselves in this way is an unconcealed presentation of how we retain a sense of self-preservation and is a

historical dynamic that influences our cultural commitment toward all of our relations. Thus, with a well-developed sense of human agency, all four women settled conclusively to begin this project by setting forth a preliminary sketch of how they see themselves—a practice, similarly, rehearsed in rug making.

Balanced against the above maternal recognition is an ideological spatial practice through the woven mapping of clan geography. *Shimásáni*, *Shimá* and *Shideezhí* weave, or have woven (in *Shimáyázhí*'s case), varied compositions of place-based rug designs, but the principal design woven by the kinswomen of our family is the *Teec Nos Pos*—a predestined choice pointed out by *Shimá*, “I did not really choose that [style]...[M]y mother [and] my sister were weaving that [design], so that’s just what I learned”. Moreover, *Teec Nos Pos*, meaning, “a circle of cottonwood trees” (*Shimá*) is a woven articulation of where our clan, *Tó’aheedliinii*, came into existence, as *Shimá* made mention:

SHIMÁ: There are certain styles that look like they’re creatures from the water, because they have webbed feet. [This] symbolizes...where we also originated from...from “the water that flows together” area, which is around the Four Corners region.

The second question of “Where are you from?” encompassed a scope of *hoghan*-based responses guided by subjective considerations, such as the physical locale that each woman lived for long periods of time, where they grew up, felt a sense of belonging and where their affections were most centered. While, *Shideezhí*, Sallie simply communicated that she was “primarily raised” in Sanders, Arizona, the responses that flowed from both *Shimáyázhí* and *Shimá* associated Blue Canyon—“about 11 miles south of Red Lake Trading Post” (*Shimáyázhí*)—and Black Mesa as their first homes. *Shimáyázhí*, presently, lives in *Naat’áanii Nééz* (Shiprock), Diné Nation, New Mexico, “the place I have lived since 1989,” whereas, *Shimá* resides in the “New Lands” part of Sanders, Arizona—a forced resettlement incited “[t]hrough the relocation



program” (*Shimá*). Nonetheless, the heartfelt replies generated from this question did not appear to attenuate the fond regard for their earliest home.

The strongest sentient response was emitted from the tender emotion that *Shimásáni* expressed when speaking about having “moved here,” removed from “where our umbilical cords are buried.” Continuing with the story, she commented specifically on how this distinguishing experience continues to pervade her life:

SHIMÁSÁNÍ: I live near Navajo Springs [Arizona] at a place called Rim House Cluster. There are many families that relocated to this area from various regions of what is, now, considered a part of the Hopi Reservation. It’s like we live in a foreign land that does not belong to us and we have been removed unwillingly from our Native lands. It’s not an ideal location for me, and the land that we relocated from was good. Too many regulations and policies to abide by, due to the fact that several families now have common usage of this small parcel of land for our livestock. It’s difficult, at times, for me to live this way. I sometimes wish I could move back to my old homestead back on my own land.

The homeward retort that *Shimásáni* openly offers is one that pithily captures an apprehension of the devastating effect of being displaced from our birth cords as a result of geopolitics.

*Shimásáni* did not exposit in greater length or detail about the emotional and psychological wounding of this experience, however, a heart-rending feeling was implicit when she commented on how “it’s been over 22 years, since I’ve moved here” and have since “pretty much stop[ped] learning new designs and styles [of weaving].” For *Shimásáni*, displacement has created a disconnecting impact in the formation of new knowledge and has had an understandingly brutalizing bearing on the social fabric of our family’s life.

Those direct experiences gave added significance and meaning to a “Diné way of life” (*Shimásáni*) when the topic of home resurfaced again. As an illustration, *Shimá* employed descriptors such as “humble” and “disciplined” to frame the context of a non-modern lifestyle that they lived out pre-relocation, while *Shimásáni* used phrases such as “basic,” “simply attired”

and “I really didn’t know we were poor.” *Shimásáni* described a facet of a naturally-occurring experience:

SHIMÁSÁNÍ: Water was hauled in barrels by wagon or we lugged water in jugs whenever our wagon and horses couldn’t make the journey down a cliff or rock outcroppings [that] form[ed] cliffs. Mainly, our source for drinking water came from natural springs. During winter, it got hard to get to these natural springs. Snow or chunks of ice was melted, then boiled, then run through a flour sack material to filter it.

Supporting this circumstance, *Shimá* provided a statement about how time, generally devoted to rest and relaxation and the suspension of regular work, was overtaken by physical work:

SHIMÁ: Nine months out of the year, we [my older sister, myself, and my younger brother] were in boarding school, and we only had three months for summer break[.] During this season, my parents [and] my grandparents would take a break from the ranching, and we took over...and it was the same way with the holiday breaks[.]

Notably, all the women, with the exception of *Shideezhí*, were hogan-raised. Albeit, she was brought up as if she were, because she was still expected to perform routine daily tasks—like the women before her—that had “nothing to do with modern machinery” and are likewise “done with your two hands” (*Shimá*). The material struggles of their existence did not make life difficult for them; contrarily, the formative effect that relocation and the employment of human, rather than mechanical, energy had on their collective identity, inevitably, expanded the coherency of their life experiences.

### **Five-fingered Consciousness**

For each of my female relations, the home-place served as the gateway that led them to learn the traditional Diné fiberwork of weaving. Identical to what I, too, beheld in our home, each acknowledged the day to day scene of watching the womenfolk weave as what “caught my interest” (*Shideezhi*). Firming the significance of this point, *Shimá* touchingly testified about how

this recurring scene catalyzed her participation at the loom, “In my family there wasn’t a day that went by without a weaving loom set up by my grandmother, great aunt, and my mother. This was all part of everyday life for me and, therefore, I could not resist from being a part of this daily occurrence of weaving.” No longer uttered in isolation, their words contain a collective memory imprinted within their hands and carry a tactile memory of how daily living decisions literally flowed from their fingertips. Resonating throughout every narrative was how this every day, yet special, event created an inward opening to historically construct the nature of their experiences that remains a time-honored means for subsistence, and continues to feed our identities and nourish our many navel connections.

**Interdependent capacities.** The active epistemological interchange that occurred amongst the land, four-legged animals, and my family, fertilized basic truths coupled to the human engagement of weaving. The knowledge co-constructed with, and not independent of, our non-human relations communicated a human collaboration that was—and continues to be—a joint intellectual effort among many animate beings. For an example of this, the induction to weaving labor, for all my female relatives, began when these women—at varying points in their childhood—were accorded the responsibility of attending to raising grazing livestock—namely, sheep. Understanding the management of cattle was necessary to remain alive; a substantive concern spoken about by *Shimásaní’s* father, Sam Blackmountain, who once said to her:

SHIMÁSANÍ: You need to care for the livestock, because we will not always be here to do for you. There will come a time when I will not be around to support, plan, and provide for you. You must understand the nature of life. While it is distinguished with an ending, it is also contiguous, because it continues on in others.”

This sense of future obligation became an intergenerational issue, eventually lived out by the descendants of my great-grandfather.

Well-mentored by “the older ladies” (*Shimáyázhí*), *Shimásání*, *Shimáyázhí* and *Shimá* “helped...shear, card, [spin], clean and dye the wool” (*Shimá*) of sheep for weaving yarn. Thus, the sustentation that raising sheep and weaving jointly brought about was the purchasing power to obtain, in exchange for rugs, “wagons, harnesses, saddles, concho belts, squash blossom necklaces, wood stoves, sewing machines, Pendleton blankets, kerosene for lamps, groceries and many other goods” (*Shimá*). *Shimáyázhí* expressed a sense of loss as she noted that at the present time “we don’t have any more sheep in our family...so we have to go to the store and buy our yarn.” Perhaps, more meaningful, however is the linkage of sheep to weaving. Profound and mutually beneficial, this relationship requires strong acknowledgement, as the artful existence of weaving would not exist without the participation of sheep.

In addition to helping apply, shape and expose patterned viewpoints, weaving implements are considered “a mainstay necessary in supplying the hard goods a family may need in life” (*Shimásání*). However, failure to comply with their intended can cause irreparable harm; in particular when they are brandished to discipline children for *Shimásání* cautions, a “child might suffer emotionally or psychologically” and we “do not possess the knowledge to repair that damage.” Likewise, when the life of a weaving tool expires, jettisoning that which renders the ability of a human to evolve into a weaver is to disrespect the gifts of the natural world. *Shimá* translated this harm in the following way: “I was told that when they’re worn out, you don’t throw them in your trash can. You take them out in nature, put them back, and say, “Thank you for all your help.”

For *Shideezhí*, the process of kindling a mental draft of how a “pattern should come out” was encouraged by “walk[ing] around [outside].” Thus, in eliciting the natural world to assist as a co-weaver, she was led to choose from the bounty of nature’s “forms and shades” that would

inevitably “catch my eye.” This sort of search was conducted without the expectation of uncovering an immediate “idea about how a pattern should come out,” and she acknowledged this by saying, “I don’t necessarily look for these things.” In a few words, *Shideezhí* shared one case in which her findings yielded a color choice found among the trees that was, in turn, interpreted within her rug as “dark green trapezoid and triangle shaped patterns.” It is precisely these kinds of recursive processes that—in due course—encouraged human introspection that beget new interpretations, valuations and practices associated with weaving knowledge.

**Beauty in human fallibility.** Creation is constant. Hence, bad thoughts can create bad conditions. Furthering this thinking, *Shideezhí* warns against conceding to a contrary or “angry way” approach. *Shimá*, in like manner, forwards the embracement of a “certain mental attitude” that requires you to “be positive.” Unwilling to pre-configure her designs, because “[it’s] all in my head,” *Shimáyázhí* believes that having “your mind clear” enables a weaver to achieve a desirable outcome. She underscored that *Shimá* enacted these sets of rules by saying, “Your mother is like that.” The aversion of “having a certain mental attitude” (*Shimáyázhí*) was made transparent through the mediated teaching and familial transference of this hereditary knowledge, as confronted by *Shimá* and *Shideezhí*:

SHIMÁ: Right now, I’m teaching my daughter to weave. [A]lthough I am teaching her...I can see some stuff that I’ve gone through, because she is often impatient. She want[s] to do something now, right away, she wants to learn “this,” and she wants to learn a certain design. You know, I don’t just tell her, “Oh no, you can’t be doing [that].” I just let her go ahead [and] test it out for herself. She’ll know that I am right (laughing), and that she should take it more slowly, and learn “this” first and then go to the next level and that’s what’s going on with my daughter.

*Shideezhí* contextualized this incident by sharing, “I [was] being told by mom, “No, don’t do it like this,” and “be sure you do [the warp] like this. Don’t make it too loose. Don’t make it too tight.” By “[not] listen[ing] to mom when she told me to take [my] time” resulted in the creation

of a “corseted rug.” Thinking aloud about the weaving process that had been imperceptible up to that point, *Shideezhí* continued:

SHIDEEZHÍ: I would look at a rug and [think], “Oh, that looks so easy,” (laughing). You know, that kind of thing I [did] when I was younger. But, when you weave it, you’re like “Oh!” And then you look at that person’s rug, you’re like, “Dang! That person actually wove that with that type of yarn?” My understanding of a lot of things grew from there.

Easily transparent, is the manner in which negative self-imposed principles infiltrated the weaving process, and was, thusly imprinted in the materialization of the finished rug. She started explaining that “[a] person finds out quick if they’re dedicated to weaving or not. They’ll find out in their own way...I [have] learned to take my time...and not think about things that aren’t really necessary[.]” In circling back to her initial discourse with *Shimá*, *Shideezhí* powerfully communicated how a newly developed sensitivity, through grounded engagement, reconstructed—for her—how meaningful participation can contend with real consequences in the world:

SHIDEEZHÍ: [T]hat [angry approach] leaves room for all these negative forces to come in and corrupt our teachings where, you know, a lot of our values and understanding of the world can get lost. And we, ourselves, end up becoming lost and have a hard time finding our way back.

At this juncture in time, *Shimá* reflected on how she had “really grown a lot” through this creative work and how the detection and acceptance of her personal impulsiveness had redefined the manner in which she greets all personal projects, “I would say as far as patience goes, where I used to not have very much of it, now I do. I [have] noticed that about myself. I don’t just rush to judgment [anymore]. I take things in a much calm[er] manner.” This growing realization also allowed her to understand more clearly that, while dazzlingly skilled, her knowledge of weaving is not one that is fully formed. Hence, in a show of humility, *Shimá* interrupts the notion that she

is an expert by stating, “Weaving teaches you a lot and I feel like I’m still learning. [I]t seems like I only know the basics right now.”

In view of the above vignettes, the question that begs to be answered is what measures are used to assess a “good rug” (*Shimásáni*)? Diné woven rugs are regularly determined by their commercial valuation which is qualified by “even edges” and “quality workmanship,” and calls the weaver to create a pattern “considered difficult” (*Shimásáni*). Sharply contrasting this judgment, *Shimáyázhí* offers her understanding:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: To me, all rugs are good. There’s no such thing as a bad rug. They’re all good rugs to me, you know? If a person is just learning how to weave, there will be some mistakes, but that person really tried their best, so I always see every rug as a good rug.

Without giving attention to the woven outcome, *Shimáyázhí* considers the active and imperfect participation in the weaving process as supremely important. The cultural appraisal that *Shimáyázhí* offers is substantiated through an ancestral rubric largely embedded in our political story and is, as *Shideezhí* contends, a hereditary personality that has “shaped me”:

SHIDEEZHÍ: I, now, know my rugs are never going to be fully perfect. As a [weaver], I’m always going know where all the flaws are, and that’s okay with me. [B]ecause in life, nothing is ever perfect, and I am okay with that. If I wasn’t okay with that then I think I would always struggle. You’ll always have to alter something. You think you have everything planned out but, something will happen that totally alters your plan. So, *you* have to alter yourself to fit the *new* plan.

This study would be incomplete without pointing out my family’s historical view of beauty—an interpretation resisting to be darkened by less than ideal conditions encumbered with struggle and is thus, forthrightly beheld as the muddied place where most of their weaving lessons occurred. Respectively, it is through the enacted discoloration of this conventional definition that the state of beauty can be found to originate, blossom and flourish, for “this is where beauty [truly] lives” (J. Nolan-Andrino, personal communication, March 28, 2013).

**Ontological root of happiness and hope.** As I was also to learn, the loom space had an affective impact on the subjective well-being of my relations. A magnifying example of this was uncovered through the youngest of member of this collective: *Shideezhí*, Sallie. The opportunity to express the intense joy that this brought to her life was apparent as she vividly spoke of completing—for the first time and to her satisfaction—a Wide Ruins patterned rug. Delighting in being able to “choose my own colors and designs,” she thrillingly added, “I love picking out different colored yarn. When I do this I get real excited! I think, “I want to use this one, this one, and this one!” She spiritedly added that since she has started weaving, “I always feel happy. I also feel way more confident in myself...more assured.” To affirm how her weavings are patterned after her personal nature and youthful ardor, *Shideezhí* shared a critique she received from a rug trader who recognized one of her jubilant renditions by exclaiming, “Wow! This is definitely you. It is very vibrant.”

*Shimá*, too, was emotionally changed by her relationship with rug weaving. Increased exposure to a loom setting protected the fragile peace of her life, particularly when “stressed out,” and provided a calming and “therapeutic” environment that made her thoughts attentional and “more clear.” Her internal effort to sustain a meditative state of consciousness heightened her sense of the emotive reach of happiness. Unveiling how this mood was not solely prevalent to the immediate present, *Shimá* offers this heart-warming decree about the grandmothers that once occupied this same role-oriented place throughout our “family history” (*Shideezhí*):

SHIMÁ: [M]any times I [have] sat before my loom [and] thought of how my grandmothers might have felt... What were they thinking when they were sitting at their looms? How were their thoughts back then? I sit there and think about those things. In a lot of ways I [think they] would be happy. I would be, because weaving brings a lot of enjoyment. Sometimes I [think], “Grandmothers, wherever you all are, this granddaughter, [Sallie], is doing this weaving.” I’m sure it [makes]



them glad. It [makes] them happy. Not only my grandmothers, [but] my father, [too]...Now, [that] I'm living [the] life...they lived.

Bound up in mental silence and impassioned expressions is performance work that carries a thunderous and life-changing impetus that affects the happiness of relatives located beyond the length of a weaver's arm—an act of reaching that, even more so, stretches past the outer limits of the material world. Tied to a genealogic and future-centered hope, *Shimáyázhí*, *Shimá*, and *Shideezhí* focused extreme attention on what it means to be “part of something that [our] family has been involved in many generations back.” For *Shideezhí*, weaving serves as the primary artery to impart information about who we are descended from, as she maintains, “I do not only weave for myself, but my ancestors.” She goes on to express:

SHIDEEZHÍ: When I weave, I think about our great grandmas and great, great grandmothers before that...all the women [and] even the men [who] wove before me. I think about them [and] even though I don't know who they are or who they were, I feel like I get to know them through my weaving.

To that end, *Shimá* carries a grandmotherly hope that “this way of life” is “passed on” and received from her as a cultural transmission replete with prolific thoughts about individual personhood and collective identity:

SHIMÁ: I hope that my grandchildren will someday be able to think about those things, too when they hear it, when they see it, or read it...that they take up [weaving] and think, “I can do what my grandmother has done. I can do what she did. I can continue this lifestyle or this way of life”...

For my current and future grandchildren, I really hope [and] wish that they would...even just for their own...I mean not to become an artist or somebody famous, but just do this work, even [if it is] for themselves. I hope that that's what they do someday: that they take it up on themselves to do that. Right now, I have two grandchildren that are boys, and if there's a girl, I really do hope she [learns to] weave. If not, I'll settle even for just one of the boys [to learn how to] weave. [H]e can, [then], teach that to his daughter.

*Shimáyázhí*, likewise, holds a desire for those most closely connected to her to develop an improved understanding of weaving by encouraging them to become attuned with a weaver's conscience by becoming weavers themselves:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: [W]eaving...has been passed on from generation to generation [in our family]...Now, it's going toward your generation, and see, Sallie, is already starting to weave. It's being passed on and it's good that it's like that. And I hope that it'll be passed on like that to your children [and] your grandchildren. I hope that you learn how to weave, too, so you see what your sister Sallie is doing. You can learn this, too, and *then* you'll find out your own answers to these questions that you are asking me (smiling).

**Bicultural engagement.** Weaving work, *Shimáyázhí* believes, is a special kind of human labor that the kinswomen in our family did “because...they didn't have jobs, they didn't have a Western education or anything, so that's how they survived.” While all of these women, with the exception of *Shimásaní*, obtained a compulsory Western-centered education, their simple and modest home life challenged the classical definition of education. What was ultimately discovered by *Shideezhí* was how this basic way of life was comprised of lessons in beingness reaped from “family,” “language,” “ceremonies” and earth-surface labor, for she noted: “we learn[ed] things about our culture in school, but at home, I felt like I learned more about this.”

Later enrolling in a Baccalaureate program at Haskell Indian Nations University, *Shideezhí* left the community of teachers she had grown up around. At the time of her emergence on this campus, she endeavored to carry the “same thinking” she acquired at home and reckoned, “When I'm out there in the world, I'm not only representing myself, I am also representing my family.” This provided a basis for *Shideezhí* to form her own rendering of loom-based scholarship, showcasing weaving's impact on our capacity to endure:

SHIDEEZHÍ: Even though I didn't have a loom with me or a place where I could weave, I still kept the same concepts that would go into weaving [with] my

school work. When I weave, I always want to do the best job that I can. I want to present my work in a good way. So, I used this same approach when I went to college. I would do the best job that I could in my writing. I strove to explain myself or express myself in the same way that I do when I express myself in my rugs. By behaving in this way, I have continued my Diné beliefs [while] in college.

*Shimáyázhí*, in turn, linked the methods of inscription used in dissertating to the intellectual efforts of loom-based science, “When you’re weaving, you have to think. It’s just like your writing, like what you’re doing right here. It’s probably the same thing. How you’re approaching how to write out whatever you’re doing, it’s the same way. There’s a lot of [the same] thinking that goes into it.” Further contained in this basket of truth, was the growing level of awareness of having to provide an inward home to host two recognizably different internal constitutions. *Shimáyázhí* speaks about this nameless phenomenon in more specific terms:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: In some cases, I think our grandmothers had teachings a bit different from nowadays. It’s like we’re more into modern things, modern ways, because there are more educated people, more educated women. They have to live like the white man’s way and the Navajo way. Both. They have to combine it or something. I don’t know what you call that.

### **It All Goes Back to Changing Woman**

In a way that was not expected, all my female relations shared that the larger context of being a weaver begins, foremost, with our beingness that “goes back to Changing Woman” (*Shimá*). *Shimáyázhí* briefly remarked, “All I know is that Changing Woman is who we come from.” *Shimásání* extended this by communicating that while Changing Woman “resides in the East sacred mountain,” we, too, originate from “White Shell Woman...[who] resides in our west sacred mountain” and we are resultantly “considered *Diné Asdzááni* (Diné women).” *Shimá* speaks to the critical attributes that originate from Changing Woman and how these

distinguishing features work to form the personal nature we, as a family of Diné women, ought to strive toward:

SHIMÁ: The way the stories are told, Changing Woman is our ancestor and she influences how we ought to live our lives. These stories contain teachings for everyday living. For example, getting up early before the sun rises, running to the East, offering up your prayer in the morning. These stories also speak to how a person or we, as women, should conduct ourselves. We need to be knowledgeable about our traditions and be mindful of those teachings, including how to healthily raise a family. These teachings have not changed. If they did, the change is slight.

Enlarging this understanding, *Shimásání* shared that her father encouraged her to live in abidance with a particular course of existence, and received counsel on using context to declare this intention:

SHIMÁSÁNÍ: [M]y father would tell me about teachings regarding the ideal way of being a Diné woman. He told me that one should not seek out gossip, speak ill-will against anyone, and speak in a degrading and harsh tone toward people. Likewise, *Sa'ahnaagháí bik'eh hózhóón* should always be included in your prayers to ensure a good journey in life. This is expressed as "I will have longevity on the corn pollen path." In the company of these daily prayers, there must also be an offering of white or yellow cornmeal. I also recall my father saying to me, "As you grow old, there will come a time when you will marry, have children, and grandchildren, and become a grandmother. At that time, you will be in the prime years of your life. At this time in your life, you will have reached old age without major illnesses or other misfortunes. It is my hope that you, my daughter, will live a good life of old age."

Continuing to share his sapience, *Shimásání* conveyed how her father also voiced how Diné traditional modalities exemplify a form of fortitude, staying power and symbolic action that encourages us to act as a catalytic force to precipitate positive change. Her description of this memory merits quoting in full:

SHIMÁSÁNÍ: My father further explained that a Diné woman should keep Diné pottery vessels, stirring sticks, a sieve made of brush, a metate, and stones for grinding in her home, as *Hózhóqí* prayers and songs are embodied in them. Likewise, he also used to express that the *Honneshgish*

(Firepoker) is our grandfather and you should always keep him in your home, because he will protect you. Weaving implements are just like the *Honneshgish* in that they can be utilized for prayers in asking for protection and used in requesting assistance to provide sustenance for the family. The shielding of family from harm also concerns how to care for a newly born child. A newborn baby should be placed in a cradleboard and positioned with the crown of their head facing grandfather fire for four days. This is done to generate a healthy process of thinking, reasoning, and awareness. In addition, a mixture of corn pollen and water is given to the newborn for these reasons also. I also recall him saying to me, “Even though the only thing you have is a corn pollen bag, regardless of your limited knowledge or learning of any Diné prayers, chants, or songs, continue to have a good heart and a good nature. Negativity and conflict are things that can create illness and, therefore, are not supportive of a healthy life. These are my teachings to you.” These are the few words I remember my father speaking.

**Contingency of knowledge.** In an interesting manner, each relative stated that they were unable to pass on any storied particulars about weaving, for they singly and collectively replied, “I don’t know” when asked if they could recount a storyline about the creation of this skill.

*Shimáyázhí* put into words:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: Well, I tried to you know find out the stories behind weaving. I wanted to learn some more about weaving, and the stories the elderly know and how they interpret weaving and...just about that time I wanted to find out where the weaving started and where it began...my grandpa [Rufus Walters] passed away. He was the only one that I was going to ask...I was depending on him for information, but he passed away. So, I didn’t know who else to ask. The only thing I heard was...the weaving part started out with Spider Woman...I don’t know the whole story with Spider Woman...I know some people will probably know, but I never researched it or anything like that. I want to learn more about it, but to this day, I haven’t heard anything.

One of the most powerful examples given by *Shideezhí* was how the discontinuation of a storied education did not equate to unknowingness, but was a condition that had the power to summon a homeward movement toward womb-based methods for learning the science of life. She spoke of this inveterate epistemology in the following way:

SHIDEEZHÍ: I'll be honest. I really don't know a whole lot of stories, like exactly how Changing Woman taught us our values, but from my perception it's about walking in beauty, meaning you're respectful and considerate toward just about everything in this world, and I try not to stray away from that. I may not know everything about my culture, but I know where I come from.

This stance marks a historic dialogic point, because it opened a ripened space to reflect “together on what we know and don't know, [so] we can then act critically to transform reality” (Shor and Friere, 1987, p. 99). Indubitably, a compelling part of our story, the terse phrases, “was never taught” (*Shimásání*), “always wanted to find out” (*Shimáyázhí*), and “I really don't know a whole lot” (*Shideezhí*) appear to indicate unanswered cultural questions, that they determine to be elusive when, in fact, they, themselves—through the power of experience—already embody, and therefore, know.

Dispelling any inherent limitations regarding “how we know what we know” (*Shideezhí*) was harvested from *Shimáyázhí*'s participation within a *Kinaaldá*—a ceremonial rite hosted at the onset of a young woman's first menses.

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: [A] lot of Navajo girls don't have *Kinaaldá* ceremonies done for them. The way my grandma used to talk was if you had that ceremony then you're more likely to overcome a lot of things. But it doesn't make you less of a Navajo woman if you don't have it. You're supposed to have two ceremonies, but I only had one, because I was in school. [However,] I don't feel like I'm less Navajo than other women who have had both. These days, a lot of young ladies don't have it, yet they still succeed in life. Like you and your sisters.

*Shimáyázhí* impresses upon the notion that not involving ourselves in this ceremonious practice does not amount to a cultural disjuncture, because our identity is ultimately affirmed through the “traditional social science” (Caracciolo, 2009) of tracing our identity back to the womb from where we originated. *Shimáyázhí* speaks to this infrangible blood cord by conclusively

expressing, “[R]emember you are *still* Navajo, because you come from your mother, who *is* Navajo.”

### **Uterine Politic of Hózhó as Maternal Diné Praxis**

The “marketable narrative” (Grande, 2008) that often compartmentalizes the practice of weaving from everyday life (M’Closkey, 2002) has been unraveled and rewoven as a pedagogical storywork that is “[a]lways continuing, and never ending” (*Shimásáni*)—a marvel that women, through our uterine center, understand well. Unhalted by the walls of cultural artifact, Diné-inspired dialogical spaces can bring us back home to material groundings that conveys a gendered political circular nature that relate to our own decolonized priorities, as Seneca scholar, Mishauna Goeman testifies:

Locating a Native feminism’s spatial dialogue that conceives of space as not bounded by geo-politics, but storied and continuous, is necessary in developing a discourse that allows Native nation building its fullest potential and members of nations its fullest protection. A Native feminist spatial discourse will converge to form different functions: (1) present alternative methods of reading space, race, gender, and nation and thus assert a political practice that razes ongoing ideologies of colonialism; (2) unmoor “truth” maps from knowledge based on imperialist projects and assert Native ways of knowing that incorporate Native women’s knowledges into the project of decolonization; (3) provide paths and routes to heal the rifts and borders that maps of difference (such as men’s/women’s space, Rez/urban) continue to construct in the wake of colonialism (Goeman, 2009, p. 184).

In the language of critical pedagogy, the “self-creating” and “self-generating” human action of weaving is driven by “an ongoing interaction of reflection, dialogue, and action—namely praxis” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2008, p. 13) within a style that yields a pragmatic, rather than an aesthetic discourse of restoration that focuses on relaying relational information. In light of bringing me into closer association of how the *dah’iistl’q* interfaces with transformative

possibilities, I have chosen to create a decolonized hybrid terrain wherein dissertating can become a textual loom space.

It was learned that the cross fertilization of the intellectual agency of weaving and research writing harbors the potential to change the experience of scholarship, as “[t]here’s a lot of [the same] thinking that goes into it” (*Shimáyázhí*). By recognizing the joy of a weaver’s subjectivity as “innate intelligence” (Meyer, 2008), the disembodied absolutes often allied with the activity or research can move us beyond the “shriveled promise” of objective understandings. Instead, becoming central to the pedagogical space of creation—especially within non-*hogan* institutions of higher education—is an unhindered engagement to the qualitative change of how the structure, process and implements of weaving can be used to guide scholarly inquiry.

I am not a weaver. I do not have experience using weaving implements created from the natural world, nor have I ever spun wool into yarn, wound warp onto a temporary frame, or labored to set up a loom; further, too, I have been encouraged to “find out [my] own answers to these questions” (*Shimáyázhí*) by becoming a weaver—a painful and rueful recognition of my shortcomings as a woman belonging to such a long-lived legacy. However, the message of this internal commentary began to alter, as I remember *Shimáyázhí*’s words,

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: When you’re weaving, you have to think. It’s just like your writing, like what you’re doing right here. It’s probably the same thing. How you’re approaching how to write out whatever you’re doing, it’s the same way. There’s a lot of thinking that goes into it.

Resultantly, in the same way that *Shideezhí* audaciously recognized her place at the loom, I, too have been so disposed and have, thusly, appealed for *Shimá*’s help to assemble and “fix the loom” and “pick out the yarn” (*Shideezhí*).



A by-product of this study, the figurative *Dah 'iistl'q* will become a textual space where “competing subjectivities” (Grande, 2004) can be beautyweaved by duplicating the rudimentary features of weaving with the stepwise counterpoints of dissertating. My intention is neither to dispirit, nor divest the weaving process of its life force by textualizing this energy. While stylistically different, this approach bears a technique similar to that which my female relations exercise, as revealed above by *Shimáyázhí*, and is so aptly expressed by Navajo weaver and scholar Wesley Thomas (1996):

The voice and words of a weaver, translated into print, through my fingers, on a keyboard, have addressed you, a possibility that was granted to me by my matrilineal kin. This is one of many ways to communicate. If I were sitting at my loom, I might have woven a weft instead—one layer onto another...weaving my own way through time, attempting to create a whole. The practices, beliefs, and traditions described here establish a sense of continuity with history. In the Navajo world, they form a whole that constructs and reconstructs cultural experience in an infinite cycle (p. 41).

This embarking begins with the *Dah 'iistl'ó keh* (loom stand or frame)—the structural foundation that preludes the weaving process. As the introductory piece to this project (Chapter One), the loom frame situates my work by prefacing the manner in which this project endeavors to adhere to the processes of *Nitsáhákees* (Thinking), *Nahat'á* (Planning), *Iiná* (Living), and *Siihasin* (Assuring). As the first gathering place for my ideas, it is in this way, that my intention and purpose are declared in corroboration with *Hózhóqji* (Beautyway).

*Bee ha 'nilchaadi'* (hand carders), *Bee adizí* (spindle), *Dah 'iistl'ó keh tsin* (rods), *bee Akintlish* (batten), and *Bee 'edzooi* (weaving comb) are wooden weaving implements. For a weaver, these handheld instruments facilitate in the interpretation and synthesis of ideas, characterized not only by the manner in which wool is converted into weft, but how they schematically aid the weaver in guiding the flow of weft through the warp. In writing, the nature of the work remains the same in that what is implicated in this process is a harmonious approach

in forming relationships between multiple ideological constructions belonging to academic, ancestral, and culturally based acumen. Relative to the phase of this process is Chapter Two, where I engage literature that speaks to how decolonizing scholarship, with aims, foundations, and goals unlike dominant-culture paradigms, offers a human dimension to research work.

*Nanoolzhée'* (warp), is indispensably the cornerstone of weaving (Bennett & Bighorse, 1997). Metaphorically speaking, it is the methodological section, or Chapter 3 of this study. In weaving, the strength and resiliency of the warp is based upon the culmination of practices, protocols, values, and attitudes that must withstand varying degrees of tribulation during the course of weaving. Endowing me with unwavering support, the network of lengthwise threads are representative of the spectrum of the Navajo worldview—multifaceted, yet all assenting to thinking, planning and living according to *Hózhó*.

*Bee atló'* (weft) are the interlocking vocal fibers of *Shimásání*, *Shimá*, *Shimáyázhí dóó Shideezhí*. Marked by continuous motion in and out of the warp, each strand of yarn represents their distinct, yet shared, wisdom. Collectively, each narrative thread works toward generating an embodied vision that imparts an intergenerational pedagogical knowing of Navajo rug weaving. Respectively, this points to their matrilineal narrations and a discussion of my findings, or Chapters 4 and 5.

*Dayiistłq* (finished woven rug) is the conclusive result of the dissertation itself. Unknowable at the time of this writing, the outcome (Chapter 6) of this dissertation will yield an animate design that forms on its own, for “if a true attempt is made toward weaving, there is no need to pre-plan a design” (M'Closkey, 2008, p. 19).

**The Academy Encounters Asdzáá Nádleehé.**

My successful ascension through the tiered layers of the academy has been a journey much like those detailed in *Diné Bahané* (Diné creation stories) where I, too, in my quest for *Hózhó* have encountered “adaptive challenges” and “disequilibria” (Begaye, 2003) within the groves of academe—a phenomena of this present world. In seeing beyond these dialectical tensions, which are intimately connected with the co-creation of my social agency as a Native woman, I am ever mindful of how my anguish is “part of a larger and much older community context of struggle” (Galicia, 2010, p. 171). This understanding has evoked a new way of seeing my role as a Diné researcher and establishes an interrelation with the ongoing present, where any human action today, including mine, should be an extension of *Diné Bahané*. As part of the storied continuum of Diné people, this has challenged me to reconsider how Western conventions of academic research can be changed by Navajo-thinking.

Initially disquieted by the seemingly binary trajectory of my academic program and my growing psychic and cultural sense of being as a Diné female scholar, or what Haudenosaunee scholar, Stephanie Waterman (2004) refers to as a “double curriculum,” was my first moccasined step in enacting what White Shield (2009) calls the “inner spiritual resources.” White Shield offers this compelling explanation:

Internal resilient resources existing within Native women enable them to overcome the staggering “odds” confronting them in the higher educational system of the majority culture. These cultural and spiritual strengths have enabled Native peoples to survive genocide in its spiritual, cultural, social, emotional, mental, and physical manifestations. With these inherent cultural and spiritual strengths fostering resiliency, fortitude, and courage among Indian peoples in general, Native women in their quest for higher educational degrees have the ability to prevail when encountering cultural discontinuity, socioeconomic barriers, and other forms of adversity (p. 48).

Embodied wayfinding figures strongly in accounting for how Native women continue to recalibrate themselves to survive the asperity of life, particularly within the contemporized role of being an Indigenous female research doctorate (McAlpin, 2008; Shotton, 2008). Accordingly,

to gain a solid foothold within institutional climates scholars, like myself, must continue to look upon Indigenous intellectual traditions—not ensconced within the enclave of the academy—to catapult our understanding of how to function within the world (Justice, 2004). This charge necessitates an internal look past the shades of colonialism, where through conventional academic training and cultural imperialism, the truth of who we are can seep beneath the surface of academic culture. Puerto Rican scholar, Antonia Darder (1998), well-expresses this point by writing on the impact of colonialism:

The yearning to remember who we are is a subject that is rarely discussed in the realms of traditional academic discourse. It is not easily measured or observed by the standard quantification of scientific inquiry, nor is it easily detected in qualitative dimensions of focus groups and ethnographic research methods. It is a deeply rooted quality, obscured by layers upon layers of human efforts to survive the impact of historical amnesia induced by the dominant policies and practices of advanced capitalism and postmodern culture (p. 129).

This awareness inspired me to listen for a language layered over with colonialism, as a means to deeply remember and reconnect to my ancient and authentic self. By uprooting Eurocentric badges and supplanting them with Diné ascriptions of womanhood, the removal of a colonially positioned blindspot has invoked a spiritual indwelling that has empowered me to recognize myself as a part of an intergenerational Diné female solidarity—one that continues to politically, socially, and culturally redefine itself. It is within this level of consciousness that I unflinchingly reached for one of the many sacred templates that Navajo women use to define ourselves: *Asdzáá Nádleehé*. Her relativity to the cosmos and weaving are accounted in the following:

To the Navajo, weaving is a sacred activity, as well as a paradigm for womanhood. In weaving a woman creates beauty and projects it into the world. In Navajo cosmology, the universe itself was woven on an enormous loom by the mythic female ancestor, Spider Woman, out of the sacred materials of the cosmos...In many respects, Changing Woman provides the model for the Navajo aesthetic of transformation. She is, in essence, mother earth, clothing herself anew in vegetation each year. She follows an endless seasonal

cycle of transformation: In spring she is young and beautiful, in summer, mature and beautiful, in fall she begins to fade... When Changing Woman was discovered as an infant on a sacred mountain by First Man and First Woman, she was arrayed in the same cosmic materials with which Spider Woman wove the universe (Berlo as cited by M'Closkey, 2002, p. 250).

Navajo historian, Jennifer Nez Denetdale (2001) asserts that *Asdzáá Nádleehé* (Changing Woman) models for Navajo women the ideal standard of womanhood that helps inform the contemporary roles that Diné women assume today. As a giver, sustainer, producer and protector of life (Witherspoon, 1977), she embodies a personality that distinguishes itself in the genteel manner, loving affection, nurturing support and selfless regard toward life that is born from and surrounds her. This representation is broadened by Cannella and Manuelito (2008):

[T]he image of Changing Woman represents the power of creation, transformation, equality and life... (an entirely different ontological and epistemological perspective than that demonstrated in the dualist notion of separation of mind/body, objectivity/subjectivity, male/female)... This organic feminine archetype [embodies] an egalitarian position from which multiple, even contradictory, epistemologies can engage equitably and with caring support (p. 52).

In a human context, this suggests the need to healthily collaborate with others in an effort to establish a “solidarity of difference” (Darder, 1998) that lies on the existing personal connection between the world and myself, and how conditions in the world are shaped by this link. This link, a “single spiritual current more ancient than tribal memory or degree of blood,” (Tsosie as cited in Denetdale, 2001, p. 18) reveals itself through me and my deference toward others, even in the midst of our differences. Having insight into my own power as *Asdzáá Nádleehé* provides a reaffirmation to understand and accept that relationships and constructions in life rest on the foundation of *Hózhó* and must exercise “political grace.”

At this juncture, it is helpful to note that decolonizing relationships that inspire the exchange of political grace are not necessarily neat and orderly. They often are forged within radical moments of suffering that establish on-going contexts where affirmation, challenge, critique, resistance, disagreement, anger, joy, frustration, confusion, confidence and other human expressions of naming the world. Within the process of

decolonizing community practice, both passive and active articulations of power are recognized as necessary parts of any dynamic that promotes democratic life. Unlike the “professional, “safe,” comfortable, and carefully manicured rules of engagement of “group relations,” a decolonizing dynamic supports a sacred space of convening, enlivened by passion, desire, activity, movement, fluidity, change, fears, tension, rage, laughter, joy, noise and tears...to be...who [we] are—all from the authority of [our] lived experiences and [our] process of unearthing subjected memories (Darder and Yiamouviannis, 2011, p. 433).

Imbued throughout this entire process is an esoteric method of inquiry that is “inwardly spiritual,” and starts from where I am (Hibbard, 2001). “Who am I? Am I who I think I am? Am I who I’m supposed to be? Am I my tribe’s vision of itself? Am I all I am capable of being and becoming?” (L. Emerson, personal communication, November 28, 2009) are a series of questions that help direct Beautyway scholars, like myself, to emphasize *Hózhó* as the bedrock of all human projects. Furthermore, as a Navajo-centered academic identity dressed with prayer, ceremony, and song, not only forefronts who I am, but perpetuates a sense of *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón*—a critical embodied lens insusceptible of robbing me of my sense of “beauty” (A. Darder, personal communication, May 28, 2008). In line with this reasoning, Recovery of the Indigenous Mind (RIM) scholar, Paula Hibbard (2001) writes, “the indigenous mind is the tribal mind and the feminine mind; it is the mind that has been suppressed, oppressed, colonized, shamed and killed out of our framework of thinking and knowing” (p. 10). Given Hibbard’s words, the development of a feminine academic stronghold that grows from Navajo values and concepts forms the mainstem of this dissertation, as a means to think and act out of a traditional knowledge center. Furthermore, it does not abstruse my cultural knowingness as a Diné woman to maternally manage my research, as “motherhood is the role from which Navajo women speak with authority” (Denetdale, 2007, p. 137)—an often foreshadowed paradigm I seek to protect in my work. Coming from the same direction, Wichita and Affiliated Tribes scholar Heather Shotton (2008) has averred in regard to the nature of her position as a researcher in saying, “I

report through the lens of an American Indian female” (p. 58). Alongside Shotton, I am “cast[ing] aside the yoke of colonization” (Austin, 2009, p. xix) and draping myself with a shawl of Indigenous female consciousness; it is in this way I endeavor to remain on a decolonizing inroad to redress my genealogical obligation as a Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish woman.

Taken as a whole, this study offers important insight into how Indigenous epistemological underpinnings, when given serious consideration—beyond a token nod—can strengthen the academic beingness of a Diné female academic identity. Tantamount to fitting a round peg in a “squared world” (Awaikta as cited in Walker, 2001), making space for new constructions from primal tools can lead to projects that are contrivances of, what Daniel Wildcat calls, “indigenuity” (Berry, 2001). “Rejecting the rhetoric and institutions of the colonizer by embracing the symbols of one’s culture and traditions is a strategy for reclaiming the primacy of one’s context in the world, against the imposition of colonialism” (Greene, 2007, p. 27)—and in this case, is a means to reconcile artful politics with primordial maternal identities and academia.

In being filled with the emotional impact of the powerfully lived insights of my female relations, I feel like a weaker version of *Shimásáni*, *Shimáyázhí*, *Shimá*, *doo Shideezhí*. However, this transitory feeling has led me to a manifesting veneration of their unyielding strength, self-powered resoluteness and infinite consciousness of Diné life. By reaching back to the deepest parts of my personal history, embedded cues in how to strive to be human originate from a feminized primordial politic, for “[i]n these stories women are active agents. They speak their minds and make decisions that will benefit them and their children. They are responsible for the creation of humans and clans. As mothers, they are all beneficent” (Denetdale, 2006, pp. 85-86). As one of many messages that can be interpreted from our creation narratives, this appraisal enunciates a personality germane to Diné women that continues to govern our way of thinking,

even as we become a part of the academic landscape in this “fourth way of life” (Sakiestewa-Gilbert, 2010). Hence, in merging the weaving narratives with the academic overlay of this study, a synthesis of how to broker the modern-day subjectivities as Diné women is rooted in a primacy of praxis.

I have come to see myself within the pedagogical experiences of the weavers in my family. Poignantly and somatically clear from the matrifocal narratives, is the embodied and daily reenactment of the personality of *Asdzáá Nádleehé*. It is in this potential that I find particularly useful in discussing how contemporary Native women see themselves “as the link between the past and the future even though different experiences and generations may separate [us]” (Denetdale, 2001, p. 18). To better reckon with how “gender constitutes both a framework for meaning and code” (Eikjok, 2007, p. 110), an inward mobilization of cultural power is necessary to resee myself as not *supposing* to be *Asdzáá Nádleehé*, but consciously acquiring an identity that imparts a culturally predetermined beingness. Henceforward, within the maternalized praxis of decolonizing labor, matrilineal headship cannot be impetuous, vision is not impermanent, goals are not short-lived, and projects must be life-giving.

Moreover, as a “[Diné] woman’s motherwork” (Udel, 2001), this form of intellectual creation is characteristically similar to the rugs my family beautyweaves. Traditionally catalyzed through the familial processing of wool into yarn—an effort my family no longer engages, due to “our removal and relocation from our homelands where our umbilical cords are buried” (*Shimásáni*), the weaving process is made up of multiple threads of execution, but is a process that ultimately returns to a beginning—a sunrise sensibility so conveyed by *Shimásáni*:

SHIMÁSÁNÍ: Every day I set up my loom and turn my thoughts to the design I want to weave. When I’m done weaving for the day, I rest so I can start early on my rug the following day. At that time, my thoughts, again, turn to my rug—always continuing, and never ending. Everything’s like that.



This circular reflexivity has shown me that “as you go along, you learn more about a different pattern [of thinking] (*Shimáyázhí*). The gradual materialization of answers to questions that I have harbored all along has been a part of a self-imposed charge to reweave an understanding of who I am; one that did not require the maternal provocation of *Shimá*, for it is, as *Shideezhí* experienced, a context for a shared historical legacy: “Maybe mom was waiting for me to initiate the asking. You know, so she [wouldn’t] feel like *she* did it...[or that] she *made* me do it. You know? [Maybe] she was waiting for me to [become] ready” (*Shideezhí*).

**Beelyaa: The Process of Becoming.** As far back as the fall of 2005, I envisaged what my emergence from this institutional journey would be like. Not in any degree, have my children been a tangential part of this vision. By contrast, they have remained at its umbilical core. In recognizing that the oracular terminology of my dissertation defense and the pomp and circumstance associated with the College of Education’s commencement may not openly present an understanding of how they are woven into the design of this occasion, I have elected to be attired in clothing furtive of the name given to me by my northern female relative, Woman from the South. While the traditional academic dress may include a doctoral robe, hood, and mortarboard or tam headwear to commemorate the zenith of my scholasticism, for me, it is a celebratory restitution of being returned to my children; a ceremony which can only be best punctuated with regalia that communicates in my loudest voice *Diné 'asdzaan nishlǫ́*, I am a Navajo woman.

An emulation of the spiral course at the heart of a ceremonial basket, the inimitable whorl atop of my head denotes “the feather of life” and is my linkage to the Holy People as a *Nihookáá Diné* (Schwarz, 1997). Thusly, the transformative head to toe process of “becoming” starts with the arrangement of my hair in a *Tsiyéél* (Navajo knot/hair bun). This is accomplished with

*Shimá*'s experienced and deft touch, as she will use a *shábitl'óól* (hair string), she created, in the fashioning of my hair. The white yarn and strands of my hair equally hold vast cultural considerations:

Traditional Navajos wear their hair long. The darker part of your hair is the male and the ends are female. But after you tie your hair together in a knot, it represents all of the good things of life. All of your possessions, your clothes, your rugs, your saddles, your bracelets, your jewelry, your vehicle, your horses, and your animals. That's what we call *yódi altas'éei*. That's what you have tied in your knot. And then when you tie it with white yarn, the yarn represents the [rays of] sunshine [or *shábitl'óól*]. Each strand is a sunbeam (McCullough-Brabson & Help, 2001, p. 141).

It is said that “a woman stands in her power if she stands in her traditional outfit” (Shotton, 2008, p. 177). In harmony with this irrefutable verity, *Shideezhí* has woven, for me, a *Biil* (rug dress). In “celebration of your dissertation,” she revealed that the colors and patterns of the rug dress were “inspired by a Navajo basket design,” whereas the hummingbirds and blue birds are seen as seasonal agents that “represent rejuvenation and regrowth”—symbols that fittingly signal the completion and start of another lifecycle (S. Wilkinson, personal communication, March 2, 2012). Emphasizing this context in greater depth, Eulalie Bonar (1996) cites Navajo weaver, Wesley Thomas, as defining the *Biil* as a stylized allusion of successive existences:

In the weaving stories, the *biil*'s mid-section is the area of emergence—the center point of creation. A human is created from the center of a woman's body, and so, too, the center of the *biil* is also the area of emergence” (p.102).

Bonar continues to refer to Thomas to provide an interpretation of how the *Biil* serves as a garbed measure of defense, “*Biil* empowered [women] not only in spirit, but in a physical sense—they shielded and protected Navajo women, the carriers of human life” (p. 132). While Rita Jishie discloses, “Rugs were the first clothing sent to us on this earth, along with our jewelry. That is how we were brought here on this earth” (p. 114). Next, in ornamenting myself

with a *Sis ligai* (concho belt), as well as jewelry made of turquoise gemstones gifted to me by *Shizhé'é* (my father) *doo Shimá*, I will recreate the manner in which *Asdzáá Nádleehé* was so adorned:

[T]hey say that a long time ago Changing Woman was dressed with all white: white shell beads, white shell earrings, white shell earrings, and a white shell bracelet. From the beginning she was called White Shell Woman, so she dressed up in white shells. The beads on her moccasins were made out of white shells, too. Because Changing Woman dressed like that, we dress in her image and wear our turquoise and our jewelry. This represents that we are introducing ourselves to the Holy People. They recognize us because of our jewelry and even when we say our clan names. Even in the afternoon when they see you wearing your jewelry, they say, "That's my child right there." (McCullough-Brabson & Help, 2001, p. 47).

Further, too, just as "*Nááts'ílid Diné*, or Rainbow Person, volunteered to be [*Asdzáá Nádleehé's*] sash" (Schwarz, 1997, p. 185), *Shimá* will mirror this act, as she works to securely wind the *Sis lichí'i* (sashbelt) around my waistline in a sunwise direction. Roseann Willink, with added detail, frames the inner nature of a *Sis lichí'i*:

A Diné woman wears her belt to assist her in making decisions; the belt has a "thinking" value associated with it. When a woman wears her belt to a meeting, it gives her power. That is why Navajo women wear a belt for the girls' puberty rite, *Kinaaldá*—it gives them strength. A Navajo saying refers to this custom, "*Sís béé dááhólíí...*" which means, "It's not up to me; it's up to the belts" (McCullough-Brabson & Help, 2001, p. 46).

Lastly, in making my presence clear by means of a strong indigenous stride is the concluding step in the sequence of assistive actions carried out by *Shimá*: outfitting my feet in traditional Navajo footwear referred to as *Ké nitsaá* (female moccasins with leggings). I have called upon on *Shicheii*, Larry Emerson, and his sage acuity to help deepen the description of their significance, which may not be immediate apparent to most people.

*Tsoi* [granddaughter] Charlotte,  
Moccasins are seen in the contexts of human body, mind and spirit as well as our purpose in life. The Blessing Way ceremony was used by Holy People to create humans, where the earth was used to create our flesh (also made up of white and yellow corn), and plants, minerals, and pollen were used to dress us.

White corn (male, White Corn Boy) is the right side of our body, while yellow corn (female, Yellow Corn Boy) is the left side. White corn meal blesses the underside of our right feet, while yellow corn meal blesses the underside of our left feet. These form our sacred foot prints when we walk the earth. Folks say that when we walk the earth and leave our sacred foot prints, we allow the mother earth to know us.

Our feet are guided by White Shell Boy when pointed east in prayer, while our heels are guided by Yellow Corn Girl. Thus our toenails are white shell, while our heels are abalone shell. We are guided in our walk in life by a spirit beam of *tódiyinii* and *nilch'i'diyiii* (water and wind spirit). The whirls on our toe and finger tips are the Holy Wind or *Nilch'i'diyin*. Moist feet are *Tódiyinii* while dry feet is the fire or *ko'diyinii*. Because each of our bodies are unique and different, we must always point with our thumbs, as when doing the morning prayer, to let the Holy People know us as unique persons.

*Ké nitsaá* are female moccasins (with wrapped leggings) worn by an unmarried woman. *Kélchi* are worn by both males and females. They signify a married woman when worn by females. *Kénineezi* have leggings and are worn by warriors with a sash belt at the top to signify spilled blood. Shoes or moccasins represent walking in harmony, beauty, balance, happiness, peace. The white part of the soles are mother earth, while upper part are the human part of us that is also father sky. The stitches are the eyes of the moccasins with the first two stitches made at the toe end of the soles.

The front half of the moccasin is also called *Hashcheowaan* (Hoghan Spirit), while the back half is called *Hashcheyalt'i'i* (Talking Spirit). Because *Hashcheyalt'i'i* is the dawn, he never touches the ground. Because *Hashcheowaan* is the earth, she always touches the ground. Some say that the two songs that are sung with the making of the moccasins are *Shabitl'ool biyiin* (sunbeam connected to the earth where the materials for the moccasins come from) and *Hooghanbiyiin* (hoghan songs connects us to the home, to our family, clans, friends and to our general health and wellbeing). Some say the white buckskin soles are father sky and the upper part is mother earth. Also, the sunbeam song is sung to bind or tie the lower and upper halves of the moccasin together. Blessing the moccasins with corn pollen is to provide the wearer with a sense of *tadadiinbiyiin* (corn pollen pathway song).

There are other teachings relating to "first walk" of the baby and "dance". But I'm not too familiar with these, except that the first walk of the baby and dance (first six steps) has been described as "starting with the left foot as *nitsahakees*, the next foot as *nahat'a*. the next step *iina*, the next *sihasin*, the next *sa'ahnaaghei*, the next *bik'ehoozhoon*. These vary according to the teacher and the ceremony though. Some add a seventh step which is *tsodizin*.

When we add all this up (and quite a bit more, as you can imagine), we have the meaning of moccasins, particularly in terms of our holy bodies, minds, spirits, dreamtime and how we are urged to walk life's pathway in harmony, beauty, balance, happiness, and peace. As such, we walk the corn pollen pathway with our moccasins (L. Emerson, personal communication, March 3, 2012).

In the simplest sense, my dissertation is a cognate of my dress. Allied in origin, they share a common ancestry, language, and primordial attributes that are proxy through my experiences leading up to my doctoral candidature. Moreover, as a conflation of western and traditional power, it is a phenomenon I intend to expose through the human act of rising to my feet to stand against the inverse of what my regalia so embodies. A gesture portrayed in the following feminine notion.

As a woman comes into her own spirit she finds Spirit within her and she begins to stand up. I'm just coming to that. It's like I talked about it all along, but it's only now that I've really come to understand it (Manitowabi as cited in Anderson, 2001, p. 183).

Therefore, to stand in defense of the dress is to stand in defense of *Hózhó*—a non-oppressive and emancipatory condition that is the material foundation of this work. The best defense against adversity is to respond with our stories (M. Sakiestewa Gilbert, personal communication, April 10, 2011), and correspondingly commit myself to stand up in full regalia to occupy a place on this campus and on the commencement stage where, despite opposing energies, that communicates to my children that a pollen pathway is a potential pathway to foster their successful emergence from all fourth world endeavors—a pathway that has obliged their relations well.

In view of this, I hope to have defined a praxis-based ethic that has connected my struggle with a larger vision of this study, which also strives to serve as a suitable response to *Shimáyázhí's* question of naming the process of blending epistemological contexts:

SHIMÁYÁZHÍ: In some cases, I think our grandmothers had teachings a bit different from nowadays. It's like we're more into modern things, modern ways, because there are more educated people, more educated women. They have to live like the white man's way and the Navajo way. Both. They have to like combine it or something. I don't know what you call that.

## Chapter 6

### Toward a Pedagogy of Beauty

*My mother is my story. She sacrificed for me, allowing me to use the enemy's tongue. Perhaps to reverse the process. Perhaps to change the process. Perhaps so I could survive the process easier than she. To acknowledge that I can manipulate the English language is to tell my her-story or re-tell shimá... That is the Diné will and spirit. And I am thankful I inherited this beauty—Esther G. Belin, *From the Belly of My Beauty**

Growing up, I never aspired to participate within the echelon of the ivory tower, or conjectured I would develop the emotive petition to name the world (Freire, 2006), or conceived of traversing along a decolonizing footpath. In so doing, I initially came to experience the intellectual life of the dominant culture as an oscillation between my academic personhood and my role as a “cultural emissary” sent by the Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish people (Erdrich, 1997; M. Gilbert, personal communication, December 15, 2010). A historical participant in the oppression of Indigenous peoples (Calloway, 2010), the academy is a structure of privilege laden with colonial practitioners who—more often than not—continue to noxiously influence the experience of Indigenous research doctorates, like myself, to incur a sense of underdevelopment as scholars, when the process of education is allowed to only be lived within a constructivist straight jacket (A. Darder, C. Davidson, G. Diaz, L. Emerson, J. Estrada, J. McAlpin, J. Singson, A. Tsosie-Mahieu, personal communication, May 26, 2010). However, by recognizing the differences and contradictions attached to this condition, a subaltern inquiry has risen aboveground to form the intent of my doctoral treatise: how am I to use my disciplinary knowledge to carry forward the delicate work of my ancestors within a post-secondary context webbed in colonization?

Gratefully, this study has allowed me to know myself and the members of my family beyond the capacities of being simply women, but as the daughters of *Asdzáá Nádleehé*. It was discovered that much about the lives of these beautyweavers are subsumed with the maternal propensity to reenact the same manner in which *Asdzáá Nádleehé* operated from. As they expressed carefully considered thoughts and narrated about the basic patterns of life, I began to understand, for the first time, who we really are and experienced how our fears and hopes progressively visibilized the prevailing context and lifeblood of our family's existence: *Hózhó*. The non-modern way of creative expression of rug weaving relies on familiar, age-old procedures and use materials typically found in the natural world. Each weaver articulated how this emic process recalibrated their individualized approach to weaving life as a group quest to restore a sense of harmony and human wellness to our family—a process which was strengthened, in large part, by the lifelong presence of a loom space. In view of this, weaving requires a labor of beauty grounded in the intellectual traditions of our family that has always served as a channel to survive the asperity of life—a manner of thinking aligned with Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), who writes of Kathie Irwin:

We don't need anyone else developing the tools which will helps us come to terms with who we are. We can and will do this work. Real power lies with who design the tools—it always has. The power is ours (p. 38).

While I began this research journey marginally aware of how “the Diné way of life...[is] good for me” (*Shimásání*), the narrations of my family have strengthened my promise to not be a passive participant of this knowledge, but to situate myself as a beautyweaver of familial knowledge, rather than see myself as disunited from this act.

As has been revisited throughout this study, drawing from a framework of female primordial identity is not provincial in scope to research work, but a ubiquitous part of

institutional survival; with this in mind, Chenault (2004) has noted that there is an existing steady stream of scholarship that actively averts the “cultural valuation” of Indigenous women. Hence, this study unapologetically disrupts the scholarly literature that supports the oppression and destabilization of local gender status and wisdom that is not only embedded, but orbits these intellectual circles. Less well known, but powerfully important are how my female relations have facilitated an unplanned return to a matrifocal Diné framework that has become the healing ligature between a “grandmother consciousness” (Hernandez, 1999) and a Western way of knowing.

Several latent areas have been identified with respect to this study. To begin, while this study focused exclusively on the matrilineality of knowledge construction—as it pertains to a Diné female academic identity—a duplication of this study that is inclusive of male relatives, extended family members, and clan relations would optimize how the epistemological view of familial ways of knowing collectively informs such an identity. Furthermore, because the narratives do not explicitly engage questions of the corresponding cultural role that Navajo males hold, there is an indeterminacy of how male gendered responses would render commonalities and differences from their feminine counterparts. What is clear is that this study is not intended to be prescriptive, as it is subject to multiple feminine and masculine Diné viewpoints. For this reason, continued explorations into how traditional Indigenous archetypes may influence the educational persistence of both male and female Indigenous students bears more research. Moreover, this is not to say that results may not be comparable, but the processes that are enacted to arrive at these answers should be taken into account to differentiate the esoteric fashion that males and females understand these teachings. Given the diminishing enrollment of Native American men in higher education (Shotton, 2008), combined with a total lack of



literature on how this group is recruited, retained, and the manner in which they persist, across undergraduate, graduate, and professional education levels, points to a longstanding need to substantively study this upsetting enrollment trend.

Significant to this study are the implications for how universities may enhance student growth and development. The state of connectedness, or lack thereof, between our tribal homelands and institutional homes can become relationally coupled when university departments and divisions can call attention to the Indigenous land base that non-Native institutions often rest themselves upon. This act of admission would serve to bring these relationships to the forefront as an expression of gratitude toward our ancestral hosts, and would redefine the entire stage of the campus as a relational space, by not limiting this understanding to the cultural houses and student support centers designed for Native students. That being the case, the simply worded question of “Do you know where you are?” can further frame the historical and territorial context of the institution (S. Waterman, personal communication, March 11, 2012). At the same time, a noxious point that is often overlooked by mainstream institutions is the spiritual intermediaries that appertain to the guided success of American Indian students in higher education. An outlook so rightly argued by Keetowah Cherokee educator, Star Oosahwee-Yellowfish (2008):

From the viewpoint of ancestors of Native peoples...higher education institutions should care about Native American students because they promised they would. The ancestors would tell stories of agreements made in forms of treaties and of family members dying so that their Native children and the children of those children would get a promised education. The ancestors would expect institutions of higher learning to be a safe environment for their children to not only learn but also to teach. It [should] be a place where all ideologies are welcomed and shared (p. 126).

Regarding Oosahwee's remarks with attention, are emerging Diné scholars, Teiyanknei Dale and Waquin Preston, who cite the need for academic schedules to sensitively comport with the seasonal calendars of tribal peoples. This, thereby, lessens the dichotomization of students

when they must succumb to the preponderance of participating in tribal ceremonials and dances that may put their institutional standing at risk, particularly when they opt to miss class to be present at local tribal functions. Correspondingly, they call for all universities to jointly work with tribal nations to implement a goal-oriented plan that meets the current needs of students who are enrolled citizens of these tribes, and to make these relationships visible to students (personal communication, March 11, 2012). In the book, “Postsecondary Education for American Indian and Alaska Natives: Higher Education for Nation Building and Self-Determination,” Brayboy (2012) points us to Wallace Coffey (Comanche) and Rebecca Tsosie (Diné) who introduce us to a “reappraisal” of sovereignty from a direction that comes from within:

[The] process of reclaiming history, tradition, cultural identity is a process of repatriation” (p. 202). Those things to be repatriated include “wisdom” (p. 203) often included and embedded within “stories” (p. 203), “cultural identity” (p. 206), and “spirituality” (p. 208). In the wisdom of Indigenous people’s relationships with place and one another, their return to a sense of tradition and an awareness of the present, and an understanding that there is an internal sense of peoplehood,” cultural sovereignty is an *internal* phenomenon” ‘the heart and soul’ of the Indian nation is located within Indian people, as communities and individuals” (p. 203, emphasis is on the original) (pp. 20-21).

In direct response, education leaders, like myself, must consider using our privileged standpoint in adroitly “combining tradition with policy work [as] an important part of nation building” (p. 29). Under this model, educational leadership must be consistent with the same epistemological outlook that our sovereign nations apply toward education.

In the matter of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and other educational institutions that no longer have land-based tribes, tribal nations must exercise due diligence in asserting their tribal sovereignty on college campuses. Since sovereignty is on the lips of tribal leaders, they must charge themselves in demanding accountability of how their citizenry are being cared for, and not minimize this responsibility when they become enrolled members of a

different kind of community. Additionally, all tribes have an obligation to paradigmatically contemporize the personality that defines an ideal tribal leadership archetype. The reason for which this ought to exist is so institutionally-constructed representations of beingness do not intercept what this means for us. This epistemological rendering would be useful, for as students continue to leave our home communities, they will understand what non-Indigenous qualities to ingest and which ones to excrete.

Denetdale (2010) narrows the overall results of this study by remarking on the regenerative capacity carried by women; a reality she notes in the following way: “women and gender are integral to the project of nation building, for women reproduce nations—biologically, culturally, and symbolically” (p. 3). To that end, I feel it to be most appropriate to conclude with the closing prayer of the Diné BlessingWay ceremony. In addition to marking the temporal end of this dissertation, this prayerful address signifies the supreme blessedness and happiness that rhythmically pulsates as the heart of this study, and is a tribal drumming that is imbibed within the unique humanity of a Diné maternal praxis of beauty.

In beauty I walk.	Hózhóogo naasháa doo
With beauty before me I walk.	Shitsijí' hózhóogo naasháa doo
With beauty behind me I walk.	Shikéédéé hózhóogo naasháa doo
With beauty above me I walk.	Shideigi hózhóogo naasháa doo
With beauty around me I walk.	T'áá altso shinaagóó hózhóogo naasháa doo
In beauty, it is restored.	Hózhó náhásdlíí'
In beauty, it is restored.	Hózhó náhásdlíí'
In beauty, it is restored .	Hózhó náhásdlíí'
In beauty, it is restored.	Hózhó náhásdlíí'

Today I will walk out, today everything negative will leave me  
 I will be as I was before, I will have a cool breeze over my body.  
 I will have a light body, I will be happy forever, nothing will hinder me.  
 I walk with beauty before me. I walk with beauty behind me.  
 I walk with beauty below me. I walk with beauty above me.  
 I walk with beauty around me. My words will be beautiful.  
 In beauty all day long may I walk.  
 Through the returning seasons, may I walk.

On the trail marked with pollen may I walk.  
With dew about my feet, may I walk.  
With beauty before me may I walk.  
With beauty behind me may I walk.  
With beauty below me may I walk.  
With beauty above me may I walk  
With beauty all around me may I walk.  
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, lively, may I walk.  
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, living again, may I walk.  
My words will be beautiful.

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